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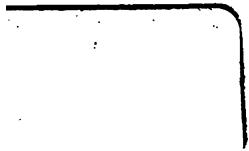
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IN THE KINGDOM
OF KERRY
&c.

B. M.
CROKER



35

"James"

With Aunt Fannie's love

New Year,

1897

N.

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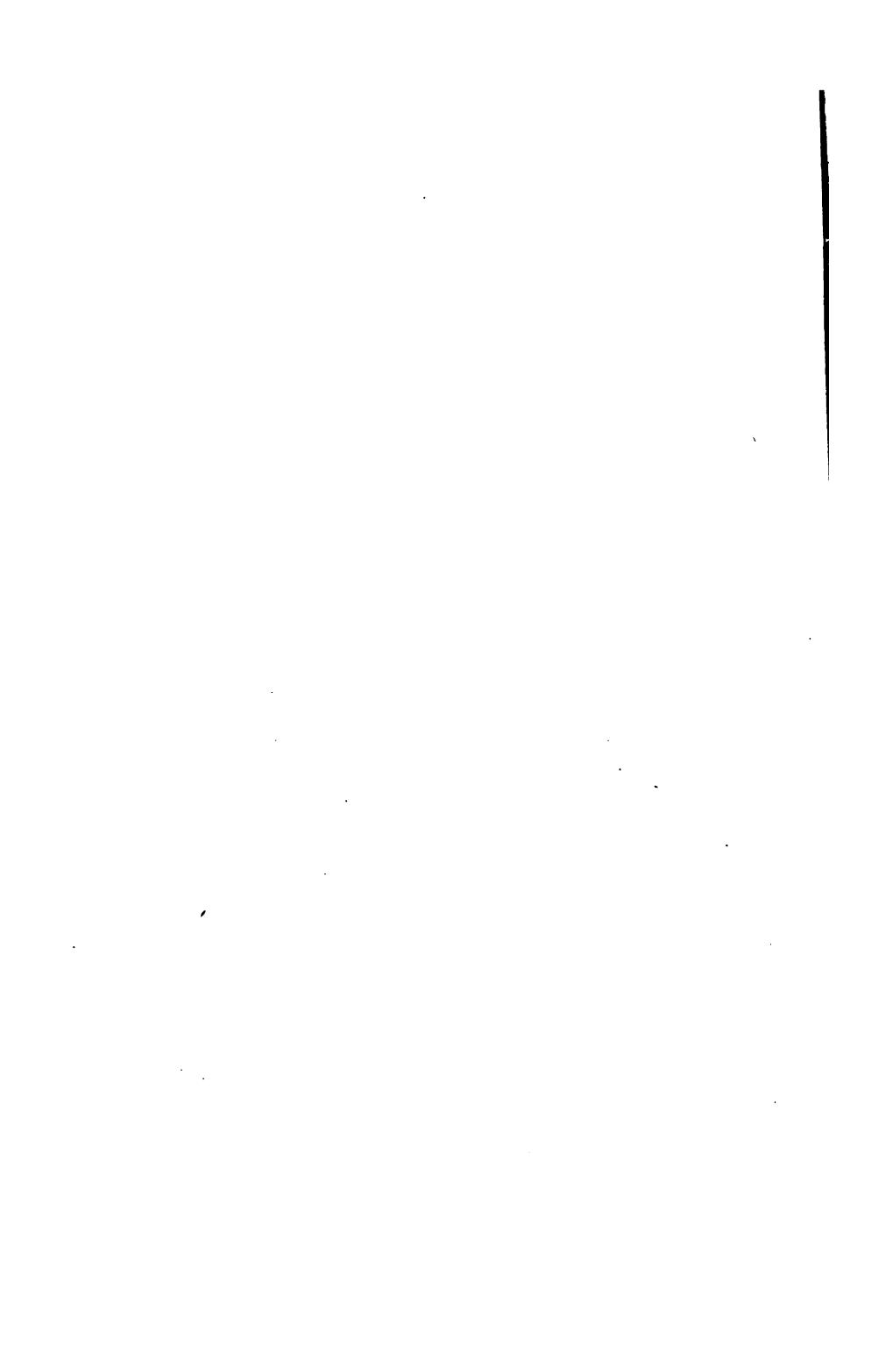
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AUTHOR OF

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LONDON
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IN THE KINGDOM OF
KERRY.

B

“ Farewell, farewell, my old love ;
Your heart will never break,
Though sore your pride be mortified,
And I the blame must take.
But if I broke a thousand hearts,
If all the world cried shame,
My new love ! my true love !
I'd love you all the same.”

JOHN O'HAGAN.

IN THE KINGDOM OF KERRY.

PART I.

IT was a warm afternoon in June, and never had the Kerry Mountains loomed of a richer, darker purple, the pastures of a more brilliant emerald green, or the tangled roadside hedges displayed such a gay (though ragged) mantle of wild roses, honeysuckle, and fuchsia.

These same hedges, however, afforded but scant protection from an almost tropical sun, and a tall, elderly country woman, in a linsey gown and heavy blue cloth cloak, was fain

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to set down her two-handled basket, wipe her freckled face, and gasp. It was Mrs. Kerwan, who had been to the fair in Killarney, and was trudging homewards to her mud cottage on the shoulder of Manger-ton ; an able-bodied, hard-working widow, who, out of respect to the fair day, wore a battered black crêpe bonnet over her scanty sandy locks. She was remarkable for white brows and lashes, prominent front teeth, and an exceedingly long, sharp tongue. Most people in Kerry have a nickname, and Mrs. Kerwan was known far and wide as "Katty the News," and richly deserved her title.

Katty's small, keen eyes were fixed upon a distant column of faint blue smoke ; this smoke ascended from the ornamental chimney of the West Lodge of Cleena Hall, her halfway house, for in the Lodge resided her cousins the Shanahans. At least half the population are connections in

IN THE KINGDOM OF KERRY. 5

those parts, and an affront offered to one will instantly bring down dozens of angry families, precisely like a swarm of hornets. Although so clannish, these hornets are not above administering deadly stings to one another. For example, Mrs. Kerwan, to quote her candid admission, "did not like a bone in the skins of Joe or Mary Shanahan," her own second cousin and his daughter. Firstly, because she and the late Mrs. Shanahan had had a small difference respecting a flock of turkeys, which had finally to be referred to the parish priest! Secondly, because Joe (a retired and pensioned herd) and his daughter Mary were under the shadow and protection of the big house, and were shockingly stuck-up in consequence! As an instance, Joe took in a weekly paper, Mary was suspected to possess white pocket-handkerchiefs, and would, no doubt, figure in hat and feathers, instead of her own hair, if she dared to face the

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neighbours. Lastly, Mary Shanahan, a personable enough girl, had refused to "walk with," or have anything to say to her son Jamsie, ay, and she a penniless slip! It was true that the said Jamsie had got into some little trouble with the police, and subsequently gone off to America, but nevertheless the affront had rankled and never been forgiven by Jamsie's mother. However, it was not old quarrels, jealousies, or even insults that she was now contemplating, it was the fond expectation of a rest in the shade and a good cup of tea, that was in Mrs. Kerwan's mind, as she once more seized her basket with an air of stern resolution, and plodded on, till she came to the green door of the West Lodge, and knocked upon it with her bony knuckles. There was the sound of the scraping back of a chair, and in another moment the visitor was admitted by a pretty girl in a pink cotton dress, with a half-darned stocking on her hand.

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“God save all here!” proclaimed Mrs. Kerwan, in a solemn, sepulchral voice, as she entered and deliberately planted down her load.

“Well, Joe”—to a prematurely old man, bent up with rheumatism, who sat by the fire—“an’ what way are ye?”

“Oh, sticking together, like a sod of wet turf; and how’s yourself, Katty?”—looking up under his eyelids.

“Faix, just waddling along! I’ve been down to the fair below. ’Tis a cruel hot day, and I’m kilt entirely, an’ I’ve called in passing, to rest my old bones a bit, and ax for a cup of spring water.”

Well she knew that no one would be more astonished than herself, had she been offered spring water instead of a steaming strong cup of tea, such as her soul loved.

“Faix, then, you’re just in the nick of time for tay and potato cake, Mrs. Kerwan,” said Mary, bustling round to place a cloth

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and teacups. “The tay is about drawed”—pointing to a squat brown teapot in the turf ashes—“and the cakes done to a turn.”

Mary Shanahan was an acknowledged country beauty, with fair hair, bright blue eyes, and an infectious smile. She was slender, erect, about twenty years of age, and kept house for her old father, who enjoyed seven shillings a week and the West Lodge rent free, besides what Mary earned by her poultry and her needle.

Mrs. Kerwan’s cold, little, glittering eyes wandered furtively round, enviously resting on the white scoured dresser, the bright scarlet geraniums in the window, the starched muslin blinds, and Mary’s rapid and deft preparations.

“Tay and potaty cakes! an’ no less; faith, then, ’tis a treasure you’ll be, Mary my heart, for the smart boy as gets ye; ay, Joe?” And she gave a shrill little laugh, like the whinny of a foal.

"Ay, ay," agreed Joe, "but smart boys looks out for a fortin' these times, and Mary has none beyond her face! Well, and what sort of a fair had ye, mam?"

"Oh, but poor enough. I sold a little Kerry stripper for four pound ten, and desperate hard set to get that same. I heard as the horses was going pretty well. English buyers over. Tim Booley got thirty pound for a grand chestnut colt, bacon is riz a halfpenny—though pigs was never so low."

"That's true!" groaned Joe, in melancholy assent.

"This is elegant tay ye have here, Mary"—now stirring and drinking, spoon in cup; "I like it better nor Maher's. How much a pound?"

"Then 'tis just eighteen-pence, Mrs. Kerwan," said Mary, in her soft, southern brogue (a low musical voice frequently lends an additional charm to the girls in the Kingdom of Kerry).

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“Now, do ye tell me that! It takes a far bether grip of the water than what I’m giving two shillin’ for; well, then—just wan more cake, since ye will have it—’tis you that has a heavy hand with the butter, darlin’, an’ good butter it is.”

Presently the business of eating and drinking came to an end. Mary put away the tea things, and settled once more to her darning, whilst Mrs. Kerwan threw off her cloak (and all reserve), and bringing her chair close up to old Joe, prepared for comfortable conversation.

They duly discussed the season, the weather, the last “Mission,” the last Land Bill, and the last murder.

“I hear as how Timothy Lyons has had a hand in *that*; bad luck to him! he is always in trouble, between drinking and fighting,” said Katty Kerwan.

“Ye may well say so!” agreed old Joe. “Last time I saw him in Maher’s he had

IN THE KINGDOM OF KERRY. 11

over thirteen bottles of porter taken, forby a glass of whisky; and porter is a *very* ugly drunk."

"Well, I've not laid eyes on him this twelvemonth, when he came to me for a little blacking for his face, when he was going to bate Pat Twiss!"

"Them Lyons is a bad lot—egg and bird," pursued Shanahan. "It would be a deed of holy charity to hang some of them! Is there no other news stirring, Katty?"

"I did hear as how Miss Maria Flood was going to take the veil at the Presentation Convent, and as how *your* young lady has got a young gentleman courtin' her at last."

"At last! did ye say? Augh, 'tisn't wan, but forty, as are coming after Miss Addie," retorted Joe, rather loftily, "but she is terrible hard to plase, and small blame to her."

"Well, I must be going me way now,"

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said Mrs. Kerwan, pulling her “cape” cloak up about her shoulders and looking round for her basket. “Oh—faix ’tis well I remembered it; now that I think of it, I did hear wan piece of grand news in at Maher’s.” She paused for a second in order to give more effect to the following announcement. “Anstey Casey is going to be married again.”

“Is it Anstey!” repeated Joe Shanahan, in a key of shrill incredulity; “may God give her sense and me money! Why, ’tis not six months since she buried ould Pat, and more betoken scarce put on a screed of black!”

“Sorra a thread,” retorted Katty, proud in the consciousness of having worn her present head-gear for eleven years. “I heard her say, with me own two ears, that it was the height of nonsense to be sticking on crape for an ould husband.”

“She’s not too young herself,” remarked Joe. “She’s up for forty-five, I’m thinking,

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as plain as a hape of stones, and as cross as a weasel."

"Ye may well say so," agreed Katty, nodding her head significantly. "Ay, an' worse to the back of it. But she has a snug little bit of a farm, and some young cattle, and old Pat's savings—in or about a hundred pounds."

"D'ye tell me that now!" exclaimed Joe, with great animation. "I wonder if she would have a notion of *me*?"

"Ah now, be aisy with your jokes, Joe Shanahan, 'tis a young husband she is getting this time—a smart, good-looking, clane-living boy!"

"The saints protect him! he must be cruel hard set, the poor devil!"

"I saw Anstey myself up the street on a side car; she had a grin on her, like a pig in an orchard, and yellow ribbons in her bonnet, and a rose—no less! Mourning, indeed—how are ye!"—with a gesture of angry scorn.

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“And tell us who’s the boy?” inquired Mary, looking up with an air of smiling expectation. Every girl is interested in a marriage.

Mrs. Kerwan hesitated, shot a swift glance from between her white lashes, cleared her throat loudly twice, and then replied in a meek, apologetic voice—

“Well, I *did* hear as it wor Denis Hurley.”

“Denis Hurley!” repeated Mary; and she plunged the darning needle deep into her hand.

For Denis was *her* sweetheart—a steady, popular young boatman known as “Denis the singer,” or more often “Handsome Denis,” who lived with his father and mother near Lock Quitaine, and earned a livelihood in rowing for one of the hotels in the season, and working on his farm in winter. Denis had been “talking” to pretty Mary Shanahan until last harvest, and then he had suddenly

cooled off for some reason mysterious to the girl. The truth was, that his father and (more especially) his mother, a shrewd, vixenish, frugal woman, had other views for him. A young fellow like Denis could easily command a farmer's daughter, with a couple of good cows and a hundred pounds. In Kerry, the matches are entirely arranged by the parents ; the last people to be consulted are the selected couple themselves.

"Oh, so it's Denis, is it ?" repeated Mary, carelessly. A Kerry girl is proud, and can conceal the Spartan fox as well as any one.

"So they say," rejoined her relative in a bolder key ; "of course, I know, dear, that Denis was talking to you this couple of years back, and had a right to be your boy ; but, ye see, he hasn't himself to plase, no more nor any young man, and when I seen Anstey walking with the father and mother, I knew she *had* him !"

"Oh, if Denis Hurley plases Anstey

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Casey, he needn't bother his head about me!"

"'Tis his mother's doing, doatie"—waxing yet more affectionate; "since she married Julia to old Scully, as keeps his gig, she has got grand notions entirely, and ye know they had to give a power o' money wid Julia, and that emptied the stocking—more betoken they kept it in a taypot—and left them very tight! an' they have had bad losses: two cows went and died on them, and their oats failed. They must have a girl with a fortune to stock the ould place, and it's a shocking poor land. Now, Anstey's no beauty, the Lord knows!—but she has the farm and a hundred pounds on a deposit receipt, a few little beasts, and a chest of good clothes, and she has her mind dead set on Denis Hurley!"

"Oh, then it's all settled, av course," said Mary, briskly, darning madly the while.

"*He* is not for it, naturally," proceeded

Mrs. Kerwan, clearing her throat, “but he sees as the ould place is racked out, and he has only his own earnings, and them not constant, five shillin’ a day for three days a week, maybe in the saison, and for six months not a hate to do, but sit with his hands in his pockets, or work at home, and sure his father can do all *that*. The Caseys are neighbours too, and Anstey’s brother, the carpenter—and the greatest outlaw and poacher in the country—sent Mrs. Hurley up an account, and Hurley and his wife met the Caseys over beyant at Burke’s Public, and did the divil and all of daling and business, striving hard to best one another. You’d hear them for a mile roaring, ‘Knock in another pound! Knock in another heifer!’ And when they left off, I believe there was not more nor the price of a pig between them!”

“I mislike them sort of marriages,” grumbled old Joe from the fire. “They

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are like priests' matches, and bring no luck."

"That's bekase you are a Dublin man, Joe, and not from these parts; now I myself never knew who I was to have, till the day I went before the priest. I axed me mother, and she said, 'Hold your tongue; whoever he is, he is good enough for the likes of yees.' And it was Mat Kerwan of all the world, and he turned out not too bad altogether, though he was fond of a sup!"

"Ay, and look at Maggie Dempsey—a nice, tight-skinned, couple girl, as was servant at the Glen Hotel, and married Jacky Burke, and there has she and her small childer, to live in the house with Burke's mad brother, never out of the place night or day—he has her heart scalded! And he is very dark in himself, and desperate dangerous, and had a right to be jailed up, but the Burkes' people won't hear of it. Maggie's mother made *that* match!"

"Well, anyhow, Denis has no one, and he will come in after the old folk ; his father is getting terribly failed, and Nan Hurley is anxious to have Denis well settled before he goes. I'm told the wedding is to be in fine style—a whole tierce of porter and two fiddlers ; maybe they'll be borrowing your ould fiddle, Joe ?" she suggested, with a patronizing nod, as she pointed to the fiddle on the wall.

"They will so," he answered with conviction.

"An' axing Mary here to the dance ; they say she has the lightest foot in the barony, and is great at a four-handed reel."

"I hope they will," said Mary, gaily ; "but for so grand a turn-out as that, I'll be wanting a new dress !"

"Miss Addie gives you her cast-offs, doesn't she ?"—with a jealous glance.

"Indeed she does. Miss Addie is very good to me."

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“And gives you employment; them’s her stockings, I suppose?”

“Yes”—holding up a black silk hose.

“Glory! but she has a big foot under her for a lady! Well now, I’m going at long last. If ye are up my way, ye will give me a look in, Mary alannah. I’d let you have that little black hen I was spakin’ of; she lays an elegant egg—as big as a goose!”

(This hen was offered, on the impulse of the moment, to soothe poor Mary’s feelings, and afford consolation to her lacerated heart.)

“Thank ye kindly, Mrs. Kerwan, but I don’t often get so far; what between the sewing, and the fowl, and going to market,” returned Mary, as she politely conducted her visitor to the gate.

Old Joe now rose, tottered to the door, and muttered aloud, as he looked after Mrs. Kerwan and her basket—

“Thin the devil sweep ye, for a long-tongued, blathering old fostooke (match-

IN THE KINGDOM OF KERRY. 21

maker) ! ye came here a purpose, to put that off your mind, for ye have always had a spite in agin' my Mary, betoken of yer own blaggard James ! And may both him and you get the luck you're looking for."

PART II.

Mrs. KERWAN's news proved to be a substantial fact as well as a nine days' wonder! Anstey Casey's relations gave out (with truly fashionable precipitancy) that a match had been "drawn down" between their well-to-do Anastasia and handsome Denis Hurley, and that the marriage was to take place as soon as the tourist season grew a little slack—in October, or at latest at Shrove. Yes, Anstey Casey had discovered that money was a power—a power which enabled her to carry off, in the face of all the envious

young girls, the best-looking and “likeliest” boy in the neighbourhood. She had, moreover, a valuable ally in the mother of Denis—a tall person, with a long, sour face, a weak digestion, and a robust will. She ruled her family absolutely. Mrs. Hurley was a wise woman in her generation—her words were few but strictly to the point. She fed her mankind well (her hot bread, home-cured bacon, and oatmeal stirabout were unrivalled)—their shirts were snow white, their Sunday suits as whole and well-brushed as any gentleman’s.

Yes, Nan Hurley thoroughly understood the power of a cheerful hearth and home ; and this self-denying, frugal, ignorant Kerry woman was, in her own sphere, as scheming, ambitious, and unscrupulous as another Catherine de Medici !

She had not failed to remark Denis walking back from Mass in company with Mary Shanahan—pretty enough, but a beggar ; and she took an early opportunity of having

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a few words with her son, and pitilessly dispelled that bright vision commonly known as “love’s young dream”!

“The farm is just wore out bare,” she remarked, one Sunday evening, as she sat opposite to Denis by the fire; “your father is that crippled with the rheumatics, he’ll barely put over the winter; an’ how are we to live at all, if ye bring in another mouth to feed, and land that girl on the top of us? She has a pretty face enough, but *that* won’t keep her and a family! Them red and white colours is always consumptive—I know it by me own sister—and Mary Shanahan has been reared comfortable, sitting at her needle indoors, and drinking tay. She’d look *well* out on the mountain-side all weathers; driving cattle, cutting furze, and picking stones. She’s too gay, too, with her pink gowns, an’ puts everything on her back! Ye don’t bring a wife of that pattern in here, Denis, as long as I’m living.”

Denis made no reply, beyond knocking the ashes out of his pipe with a noisy impatience.

“Av coarse ye can live elsewhere, but ye will find your earnings go a short way when ye come to pay for rent, and food, and turf, and clothes. Ye will be just a stack of rags before the year is out !”

Denis considered the warm, comfortable kitchen, with its flitches of bacon and glowing turf fire ; he appreciated a well-filled pipe and a good respectable suit. Could he relinquish all this for the sake of Mary Shanahan ? Yes, he could.

“A settled, sensible woman, like Anstey Casey, who can put her land and money to your land, is the right sort of wife for ye, Denis,” pursued his mother. “I grant you she is no great shakes to look at, but she is a most respectable girl.”

“*Girl!*” he echoed ferociously.

“Well spoken of, and well off”—as if she

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had not heard him. “I saw her deposit receipt myself with my own two eyes. Ye could stock the land finely, and kape cows, and maybe a harse of your own—and give up that boatin’ and fishin’; I hate it, ever since Bridget Scanlan lost her sons over in the lower lake. Denis, me own boy, do you think you could marry Anstey ? ”

A long pause—at last the answer came.

“I think, mother”—looking up from under his straight black brows—“that I’d a dale sooner *die*.”

“Well, listen to me now, my son. In that case we will *all* die ! There is nothing on the land at all, savin’ a couple of ould puck goats and a flock of geese ! I’d have managed to worry along till the spring, if the cows and heifer had not gone and died on me ! I owe a terrible big bill in Maher’s shop, as it is—and they axed me for it too, a thing they never done before ; and your father had great arrears of rent to pay, and

there was the parish dues, and ye know we were always liberal to our priest and church. I can't have Father Brian disappointed, and looking shy at me. And I declare to God, Denis, I don't know how we are to hould up our heads and put over the winter."

“But Anstey Casey, mother!” he groaned. “I can't bear her! The very sight of her gives me a sort of turn.”

“You'd soon get used to her, Denny, lovey; in six months' time it would be all as wan, as if she was a rale beauty, and you'll be the money to the good. She has a terrible fancy for ye; I saw her hanging back and loitering coming from the chapel to-day, and looking round for ye, over and over. Oh, Denis, me darlin', these are cruel bad times for me, and if you would not break your old mother's heart, ye will marry Anstey Casey”—and Mrs. Hurley, who was a rigid and undemonstrative person, astonished and terrified her son by suddenly

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throwing her checked apron over her head and bursting into loud convulsive sobs.

Denis, after sitting for a few seconds in dumb, miserable embarrassment, muttered some half-indistinct promise, then rose sheepishly, and went out into the cool, dim night.

Silence had spoken—he had consented.

Till dawn, he wandered through the hills, almost unconscious of his steps ; now following a rushing brown torrent that descended impetuously to the lakes, now wading knee deep in bracken and heather. The little black mountain cattle raised their sleepy heads to gaze at him as he hurried by, accompanied by two pale companions—those mutual enemies—Love and Duty. None but Denis was aware of their deadly hand-to-hand conflict on the Eagle Mountain under the watching stars.

By daybreak, Love, alas ! broken-hearted, was overcome and abandoned, whilst hard-

featured Duty placed her shackles on young Hurley, and led him home.

Denis and Mary Shanahan had been acquainted since childhood, and had been “talking” to one another for two years ; they had not gone quite so far as to mention the word “marriage,” but they had mutually admired a sunny little house on the Torc mountain. But of late, these talks had ceased, and there was nought between them now but sighs. Mary was totally ignorant of the reason of Denis’s defection, or of his notable interview with his mother, that Sunday night. She manufactured hundreds of excellent and plausible reasons for his absence. He was busy—it was a “throng” season—he had no time for philandering round. She accepted anything sooner than the hideous fact that Denis was inconstant. No, he was as true as the sun, as true as she was to him, though nothing binding had ever passed between them,—but sure, ever

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since she was in pinafores, it had always been "Mary and Denis."

Consequently the unexpected announcement of his engagement to Anstey Casey fell like a thunderbolt !

Mary seldom went abroad beyond the chapel and the village, or an errand to the big house ; she now kept within more than usual, and her pretty colour became a little faded, her smile was mechanical, and her appetite *nil*.

One evening, however, she was compelled to go out to a neighbour's in quest of a promised sitting of eggs. It had been a wet afternoon, but clouds and mists had cleared away, the sun shone, and everything looked fresh, glistening, and green, in that soft, tepid atmosphere. As Mary climbed up a steep lane, between high banks of heather and yellow broom, she descried a well-known, long-looked-for figure, rapidly descending the hill—a square-shouldered

young man, with a resolute face, and the black hair and dark-blue eyes so common in the west. As the pair approached, they gradually slackened speed, first from a brisk walk to a slow one, then to a crawl ; finally they came to a standstill, about three paces apart. It seemed to him that she had grown paler and fairer.

“An’ is that yourself, Mary ?” Denis asked at last.

“Faix, I believe it is, Denis,” she answered sedately.

“It’s a fine evening.”

“It is so”—now smiling radiantly.

Who could guess at the agonizing hours spent in that little room off the kitchen (with its patchwork quilt, unearthly red-and-white china dogs, and real rosewood work-box), or of the moments when Mary had rocked herself to and fro, sobbing, “Denis ! Denis ! Denis !” ? Or who had ever seen Mary’s nearest approach to a love-letter, and chiefest treasure ?

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Although stored in a clean handkerchief inside her Mass book, yet it was not much to look at after all ; merely a thick envelope (now greatly worn), which she had found leaning shyly against her window-pane one moonlit summer's night, as if praying for admittance ; it enclosed a sprig of white heather, and a sheet of paper, on which, with infinite pains, an unskilled hand had traced these words :—

“ Girl of the blue eye,
 Love me ! Love me !
 Girl of the dew eye,
 Love me !
Worlds hang for lamps on high,
And thought's world lives in thy
Lustrous and tender eye,
 Girl of the blue eye, love me !

“ Girl of the low voice,
 Love me ! Love me !
 Girl of the sweet voice,
 Love me !
Like the echo of a bell,
Like the babbling of a well,
Sweeter ! Love within doth dwell.
 Oh ! girl of the low voice, love me ! ”

The lines were signed "Martin MacDermott," but the handwriting was the writing of Denis Hurley.

How many kisses had been wasted on that irresponsible sheet of paper—the survivor of a whole dozen that Denis had ruined, between bad spelling, smears, blots, and the unexampled nervousness the brave young boatman brought to this overwhelming effort?

"I have not had sight, or light of ye, this long time, Mary—how is that?" continued this false lover, assuming an ill-used air.

"Faix, I hear you are going to be married, Denis, and sure ye had something to do forby looking for me—an'—I give ye joy with all my heart."

(Many a time this sentence had been rehearsed in private, and, on the whole, it now came out merrily and well.)

"Married, am I? and to whom?"—with an expression of blank astonishment that no man of the world could have surpassed.

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“Ah, now, don’t be pretending, and going on with your nonsense, and letting on ye didn’t know—why, to Anstey Casey, to be sure.”

“She’s a friend of me mother’s.”

“Faix, she’s nigh your mother’s *age* sure enough, but she’s your intended, they say ; and I hear ye have lost your eyesight writing her love-letters !” she added with a scornful laugh.

“By me oath, I never wrote her a line in me life.”

“Is that so ? Well, maybe when you’re always with her, it’s no great deprivation”—with a meditative smile.

“Is it always with her—me !”—with angry repudiation. “I never go within the bawl of an ass of her.”

“Then ye’d make believe that your mother did the courting !” (which she did, and well). “Now what’s the good of talking like that, Denis me boy ? since we all know as the

match is made ! Didn't ye walk home from Mass with her ere Sunday week ? Ye must ask me to the wedding, Denis, for old times' sake, won't ye ? And now I can't be wasting me day colloguing—good evening, and good luck to ye," and she nodded a gay farewell. As she nodded, her green plaid shawl fell back from her beautiful golden head ; excitement had given unwonted colour to her cheek and to her eye ; she looked brilliantly lovely, this poor country girl, who was fighting so bravely for her maidenly dignity. Oh ! what a contrast, this slim, blue-eyed colleen, full of the life and vitality of twenty summers, afforded to elderly Anstey, with her sandy hair, squat, formless shape, and yellow teeth !"

"Stop, Mary Shanahan," cried the young man, hoarsely. "Stop now," he repeated, with a stamp of his foot. "Ye know as well as I do, Mary, and bether, it's yourself I care for, and me heart is broken in four pieces.

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O Saints and Angels of Heaven ! If I had but forty pounds ! But where would I get a fortin' ? Sure I've only me weekly earnings. 'Tis the land that has destroyed us—you and me, Mary ! It's clane wore out ; there's hardly a blade of grass on it, and I have no money to hearten it, or stock it. Many things has come against us Hurleys. First of all, me mother give too big a dowry with Julia entirely, and then me father had long arrears of rent to pay ; it was just that, or quit ! We held out as long as the best in it. He was only entitled to a clear receipt on payment of two years' rent ; he owed nine, ye see ! And he had to pay the two years, or go, so that was wan loss. Then the two cows and the little black heifer, that got the disease, was another ; and he speculated in the stocks, by the advice of some blathering blaggard, and lost nigh seventy pounds—me mother does not know, or she'd lose her reason. She thinks it went

in the arrears. 'Tis a great mercy women doesn't understand business. Well, we are stone broke, ye see ! If it was only working, I'd work me hands to the bone for me mother. But it's not that she wants ; 'tis me very heart's blood, and she's asking for it night and day : I must marry Anstey for her fortune."

"Oh yes, av course I understand that, for what else ?" retorted Mary, with a heartless laugh.

"She's no beauty," he continued.

"Indeed ye never spake a truer word ! Ye might put her out on the door step, if ye wanted to draw a crowd !"

"She has a few acres, and the house, a hundred pounds, and seven nice little bastes," he persisted doggedly.

"Seven little bastes, and only wan eye ! But sure 'tis not for me to be passing remarks on Mrs. Denis Hurley."

"Oh ! Mary, Mary, if ye only guessed how

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miserable I am! I, that used to be the great singer in our boat, can never raise a song at all now. I've not sung them, 'Kate Kearney,' or 'Rich and Rare,' for months. I tell them me voice has gone; 'tis that me heart is broken between yees. I can't see me old mother starve, can I? Her that reared me! And I can't give you up, the very pulse of me life, and yet I must, I must!" And the impressionable, emotional, half-distracted young man, finding that English fettered his utterance, now broke into his mother—or rather grandmother's—tongue.

"You're my own little girl, Mary acushla oge, that has removed the very spring of my heart! I swear by all that is holy in heaven, that, married or single, it will never beat for any one but you. I cannot forget you, machree asthore, though I've tried hard, and if I was only let alone, I'd die, and gladly, for the sake of Mary Shanahan!"

A wandering, semi-lost tourist came un-

expectedly in sight of the pair and halted, greatly amazed. Who was this handsome, dark, young mountaineer, and why was he gesticulating and pouring forth floods of fiery eloquence in a foreign tongue, to a pale, fair-haired girl, with the face and demeanour of a stone statue ?

As he timidly approached, the torrent of words ceased, and the girl suddenly turned and fled down the hill, like a frightened hare, as if she were running for her life.

“ Hullo ! I think I know your face. Why, you’re Denis the boatman, with the tenor voice,” exclaimed the stranger. “ I never heard Irish spoken before ; was that the Irish language ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ And was that pretty girl your sweetheart ? ”

“ She was, sir ? ”

This was strictly true. She was once his sweetheart.

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"I must confess that I greatly admire your taste, Denis," remarked the visitor, with a knowing wink.

Denis waxed black, a fine old Irish scowl crept over his good-looking countenance. What would the English gentleman say to his taste if he saw Anstey Casey?

PART III.

THE months of July and August dragged hotly and heavily by. The big house, which had been empty all summer, was now filled with a large party for the shooting. Miss Addie gave plenty of employment in the shape of needlework to her pretty *protégée*. Her pretty *protégée* had been noted by Miss Addie's intended, a clever young officer of Engineers, who played the violin admirably, and took photographs somewhat less admirably, and had made the mothers of several beautiful babies his bitter enemies for life !

"I should like to photograph your little Kerry beauty, Addie," he said. "I met

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her in the avenue and received such a nice curtsey ; she has not merely a pretty, but an uncommon face ; her lovely blue eyes have a sad, resigned, exalted sort of expression that is most fetching ; she looks like some suffering saint and martyr," and he laughed.

But Miss Addie did not laugh. She had heard of Denis and Anstey, and could account for that "uncommon expression."

Captain Elton was duly and formally introduced to the West Lodge, to Mary, and to Joe. He took their photographs, and generously brought them copies. On this latter occasion it came on to rain heavily, and he and his *fiancée* were weather-bound at the lodge. Casting round for a topic, Miss O'Moore's dark eyes fell upon an old fiddle, where it hung above the fireplace, in uncongenial company with a scythe and a landing-net, and she said—

"Oh, Cuthbert, Joe here plays the violin

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like yourself, only better. Joe, will you give us a tune?"

"Sure I have not touched it for two years, Miss Addie; my fingers are like ten bits of wood—and it has no strings at all, as ye see. I lent it to Tim Purcell, the fiddler, for wakes and weddings, and last time he had it he was mad drunk, and broke it on me."

"Show it here, and I'll fix it for you. I have plenty of strings," said the officer, good-naturedly.

"Mary honey, rache it down to his honour;" and Mary honey handed him a long, dark violin, not unacquainted with dust, and having a fine big cobweb in its interior.

Captain Elton examined it critically, and in silence, for a considerable time, and then old Joe exclaimed—

"Don't I know it's no good at all *now*, sir; wance it had a wonderful sweet tone—but it's terrible old."

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“ Terrible old, indeed ! When did you get it ? ”

“ Faix 'twasn't even *I* got it, but me father ; and he come by it by accident, as it wor, about forty year ago. There wor a grand auction at Kilraine Castle—stacks of pictures and rubbish, and queer useless things, sold—the ould man's ‘selection’ they called it, I think—as well as beautiful solid mahogany furniture. Me father got a great bargain of a fine stout oak box for ninepence ; everything was going for nothing, ye may say, for Kilraine is out of the way, and there was no dealers, seeing as trash wasn't the fashion *then*. Well, when me father took home the box, and went to open it, if there wasn't the fiddle inside it ! It was just one of Kilraine's ould rattletreaps. But I tuned it up a bit, and it wasn't altogether too bad. I used to play on it, and lend it round the county, but it's bet up teetotally now. Still, it had wance a rare fine tone ! ”

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"I shouldn't wonder if it had," said Captain Elton, who had been examining the instrument with grave attention. "Look here, Joe, will you sell it?"

"Is it sell it, sir? God give you sense, and me money! Sure it's not worth talking about. Take it, and keep it, and kindly welcome, your honour."

"No, no, I will sell it for you, if I may, and give the price of it to Mary, here, for her wedding gown."

"That will be as you please, sir. But I misdoubt if the price of it would go far in any material," and he chuckled.

"Well, you may leave that to me. I'll do the best I can for Mary, Joe. And now the rain has stopped, I'll take it up to the house, and send it to London. Good evening to you," he added, and he walked off carrying the old violin.

"What do you think of it, Cuthbert?" inquired his *fiancée*, eagerly. "Is it really

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worth anything? How I wish it was! What do you think about it?"

"I think, nay, I know, that they make marvellous imitations nowadays, Addie, and I am afraid to commit myself. I put a strong restraint on my tongue when I first saw it, and did not shout out 'A Cremona.' I shall send it to an expert in town at once; and I must say that I think it looks genuine, and is either a 'Strad' or an 'Amati.'"

"Oh, Cuthbert, how delightful! And Mary may yet get a good sum—a fortune—and marry Denis yet!"

And she clapped her hands and actually began to dance on the damp avenue!

"Never count your chickens before they are hatched, Miss O'Moore! Personally, I have no sympathy with Denis and his self-immolation on the altar of sheep and oxen. If I were in his place I'd have run away with Mary long, long ago. But about the fiddle. Its surroundings and its story are

credible—as well as romantic. Old Kilraine was a noted connoisseur. His ‘selection,’ as Joe called it, was scattered to the four winds, like pearls among swine, and I am in great hopes that, at the present moment, I have one of these said pearls under my arm !”

“ And if so, what will it fetch ? ”

“ You mercenary girl ! You are not thinking of its tone, its date, its artistic value, only of your beauty at the gate lodge ! ”

“ Yes, only of her.”

“ I dare say it will fetch, if its date 1690 is not a lie, from two to three hundred pounds.”

“ Oh, Cuthbert, you dear ! ”

“ Yes, the fiddle will be dear also, if it’s genuine ! Of course, I may be mistaken, but I think I know a valuable fiddle when I see it. It is very light, a sure sign of age ; it is beautifully finished ; it vibrates at a touch ; in fact, it is nearly as sensitive

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as Mary's complexion. By the way, I should have thought your beauty could have had her pick of suitors, with that face!"

"Not she. Down here, only money counts—money, and cattle, and pigs. A husband goes to the highest bidder, and Mary's young man has been disposed of by his mother—sacrificed to a widow woman of five and forty, with a farm, some savings, and an awful temper. They say she used to beat her first husband with a long-handled saucepan."

"But Denis has not been told off yet, has he?"

"No, but the execution is fixed for next month."

"I saw him the other day looking as if he was calculating the depth of the lake. He is a smart, well-set-up sort of fellow. I don't think he would stand the saucepan."

"No, and perhaps this fiddle may be the saving of him and Mary."

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"But if the other amiable lady runs him in for breach of promise, how will that be?"

"It will be his mother's affair"—indifferently. "She is responsible. She has managed the whole transaction. Old Anstey knows that she has purchased a most unwilling suitor—not an uncommon feature in these matches. But he is not quite so bad as a young man I once heard of, who cried for three whole days before his wedding!"

"And had he *no* say in the matter?"

"No, not a word. It would be a frightful breach of etiquette."

"Miserable wretch! He has my profound sympathy."

"Cuthbert! How dare you! I shall never forgive you for that speech, unless you get me hundreds of pounds for that old violin."

PART IV.

“Was ever woman in this humour woo’d?”

“WAIT—hold on, Mary, and I’ll ‘share this umbrella with you,” cried Captain Elton, as he endeavoured to come up with the girl he called Addie’s “beauty,” who was hurrying home from market with merely her green shawl over her head.

“Thank ye kindly, sir, but I wouldn’t like to trouble you,” she answered, pausing and blushing. “Sure an’ I don’t mind a little drop of wet.”

“That’s how all you people lay up a store of rheumatism for your old age”—holding the umbrella over her head as he walked beside her.

“Well, sir, ’tisn’t much else as we have to lay up in these parts, as I knows on,”

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“That is true, and I don’t understand how it is, since this is a most fertile country.”

“Barrin’ the mountain lands, yer honour, as bare as me palm !”

“Ay, I’ll allow that *they* are barren—but these valleys seem to teem with crops. Mary ! you ought to be proud of your country. I never saw such scenery.”

“’Tis grand entirely ; an’ I hear as the mountains in England are just clods beside ours ; still an all, great landscapes only fills the eye—an nothing else.”

“Oh, there I think you are wrong. Beautiful landscapes attract crowds to admire them—crowds must be fed and housed—and driven about—yes, and *rowed* about” (significantly). “They bring money and employment into the country. Why, your Denis is a boatman, who lives by tourists and the scenery.”

“Don’t call him *my* Denis, sir, an I’ll thank ye”—very stiffly.

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"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mary. I thought he was your property."

"'Tis Miss Addie has been, maybe, putting foolish notions into your head, sir," she added in a softer key.

"I should not be surprised if she had. Well, about that fiddle, Mary. I have not heard as yet, but I expect to get a letter by any post."

"It's very kind of yer honour taking so much trouble, an indeed I'm afraid you will have your inconvenience for nothing. It's wore out, that it is, and played upon and battered about by every ould musician in the country."

At this moment Mary and her companion were overtaken by a car, which splashed past them at a great pace. Seated on one side was Anstey Casey, grinning with triumph (wearing the identical grin, as noted by "Katty the news"), and beside her was Denis Hurley—the slave at her chariot

wheel! After this spectacle, conversation languished, and gradually expired. Captain Elton ventured to cast one glance at Mary. Her face was colourless and rigid, and, as he was now quite close to a side entrance to the big house, he gladly took leave of her and his umbrella. This he insisted she should use until she reached the West Lodge, which was fully a quarter of a mile distant.

As she proceeded onwards alone, Mary heard the rapid footsteps of some one running after her; the some one proved to be Denis, who thus accosted her in spasmodic gasps:

“Well, an’ wasn’t thon a pretty sight?”

“Faix, an’ I would not go as far as all that,” replied Mary, scornfully; “but I hope ye enjoyed your *drive*?”

“Drive be hanged! She overtook me, an’ fairly tormented me to take a lift. I mane about your walking with a gentleman,

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and under the wan umbrella, and no less ! Now stop," he panted, " let *me* spake. I don't know all about him, and how he has been to the lodge over and over, and took yer picture and borrowed Joe's old violin. I heard everything from Blake the boot-boy up at the big house. Ye ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mary Shanahan ; no dacent girl——"

" There now," she interrupted with blazing eyes, " that will do. Don't dar to go and call me out of me name, Denis Hurley. What is it to you who I spake to, gentle or simple ? Mind your own business, av ye plase."

" Faix I'll mind *his* business, anyhow !" retorted Denis, with a queer light in his dark-blue eyes. " And if I ever catch him making so free as to spake to ye again, I'll bate him into flittergigs ; an so ye can tell him ! Let him keep to his own soort ! "

" An isn't he Miss Addie's young gentle-

man?" demanded Mary, pausing, and looking at her companion dramatically.

"Then the more shame for him, and you!" rejoined Denis, who was literally shaking with passion.

As she was now at the end of her journey, Mary turned upon her escort, and said in a clear, sharp voice—

"Denis Hurley, 'tis *ye* had a right to be ashamed of yourself, and black ashamed! What ails ye the day? Ye must be out of your mind—looking so swollen, and so savage—an maybe ye have drink taken? Take my advice and keep yourself cool, and go back now quietly to your own Anstey. If I wor her, I'd be mad jealous; ye have no call whatever to be running and shouting after another girl. Not that Anstey is a *girl*, being nigh as old as your grandmother. Go back now, I tell *ye*, or there may be trouble."

At the word "trouble" she clanged the

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gate violently in his face ; then for a second confronted him through the bars, white and breathless, ere she turned about and ran into the lodge.

“ The blessed saints knows there’s trouble enough—an’ too much trouble—in this world for *me!* ” he groaned, as he moved slowly away. “ What’s to hinder me from lepping into the lake ? What’s the use of living at all, at all ? God ! I wish I was in another state—even purgatory.”

PART V.

“Prends moy tel que je suy.”

OLD Joe was a man of early hours, and retired to rest about eight o'clock. It was the next evening but one after her interview with Denis, and Mary was sitting alone in the kitchen sewing, when she heard the gate swing, steps—no, not passing on, but coming to the cottage—then a faint knock. She opened the door boldly, and saw a tall man's figure against the stars. It was Denis, Denis who had not darkened their threshold for many months.

“Mary,” he began, and his voice trembled a little, “I've cooled an’—I've come humbly to ax yer pardon, for ere—yesterday, and what I said—ye know, about the captain.”

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"Oh"—raising her head several inches—"Av coarse, I put all *that* under me feet!—and yer pardon is granted then. Will ye walk in, Denis, and take a sate?"

"Ye know how it is"—following her to the table, but still standing. "I can't bear to see no one spaking to ye but myself. A sort of madness takes me head, and me blood feels on fire—and I couldn't be answerable for what I do to a man, be it lord or be it a constable of the police, that I saw making up to ye—and I hear Constable Carr is watching ye. I couldn't live or breathe in the same country, and you married to another fellow—and so I'm going to Ameriky on Saturday."

"Ameriky—and Anstey?" she faltered, dropping into a chair.

"'Twas Anstey put the notion in me head! Every time I looked at her, I said to myself, 'I'll run away off to Ameriky'—and anyhow, it's all at an end between her

and me. Praise and glory be to Almighty God!"

"Then won't ye sit down, Denis, and tell me all about it?"—pushing a chair towards him with hands that shook.

"It happened ere yesterday—when she overtook me, and dragged me up alongside of her, on the car, again' my sober will—and she and Dan Casey began cracking their jokes, and jeering. Well, when we went by you, she passed an ugly remark—as she had no call to—and that made me fairly wild—and one word led on to another. She called you by a name as I wouldn't take in me mouth, and I called her by another that wasn't a compliment; so she up with the handle of her umbrella, and hit me a clip over the head, as nearly knocked me off the car! That was enough; I lepped down, then and there, and ran back after you—and ye know all that. Do ye think I'd have Anstey now, if she was to be hung in

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diamonds? A baste of a woman, as took to bating me *afore* we wor married!"

"And your mother, Denis?" asked his listener, tremulously.

"Well, Mary, to tell you the truth, I'm black out with me mother, and she with me—and that's wan reason I'm off on Saturday to Ameriky. My sister Julia has been well done for, and will care the old people—and I will get employment—they give good wages to them as are not afraid to work—and I'm going over for a year—or maybe two—to work for you—and me."

"Oh, Denis,—but what will your people do at all, at all for money?" And her dark-blue eyes grew tragic.

"Me people will do right well! Sure hasn't me mother a whole taypot full of bank-notes, and I never suspicioned it. Ere last night, when I went home unexpected—for she thought I was in Killarney—the house was as black as a bag and was shut

fast, and I could not get in anyhow ; for the kay wasn't under the thatch, and the door was locked on the inside—and then I noticed a stim of light in the room, and went and laid me eye agin the bit of a winder. Glory ! I nearly lost me sight entirely, when I saw me mother sitting at her aise at the table, with a candle, an empty taypot, and a power of one pound notes spread out before her—if there was wan there was forty. Well, after that, I withdrew, and hammered the divil's own delight on the door, and she came and let me in, and said she had been up the room saying her prayers ! 'Tis true. Well, with that, I opened out, and tould all about Anstey ; and she was near the *other* thing from praying, an' axed what was to become of her and me father—but the poor-house ?

“ ‘ And what about them tay laves, mother ? ’ I says, ‘ as ye were looking over a while back ? I saw ye through the winder.’

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“ ‘Oh, then bad scran to me, for not putting the little book in it !’ says she, quite calm and collected.

“ ‘And so,’ says I, ‘ye would sell me, body and soul, to old Anstey Casey—me, thinking I was kaping ye from poverty at that price, and all the time ye have a store !’

“ ‘Tis only a few pounds,’ says she, ‘for your wedding, and our burying.’

“ ‘Lave the wedding and your burying to me,’ says I, ‘and put the money out, where it ought to be, in stock and in young beasts, and seed potatoes, and phosphate manure—instead of hoarding it in a taypot, and making a poor mouth, and wringing the very heart out of your son’s body !’

“ Then she up and spake very bitter—and so I told her I was going off to Patsey Cairns in New York—and there we left it.”

“ Oh, Denis !” gasped Mary, gazing at him with awestruck eyes—for the son who

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defied such a formidable mother as Nan Hurley was a truly brave man !

“An’ ye will wait for me, Mary darlin’, and I’ll come home, plase God, and we will take the little brown house beyont, near the holy well, on the Torc mountain.”

“Whatever ye plase, Denis,” she whispered almost inaudibly.

“Then a kiss, since ye put it that way, would plase me, Mary.”

“Is it after Anstey ?”—pushing him back roughly.

“I never kissed her, I’d as lief have kissed the ould golden aigle at Muckross !”

“Whist now ! Here’s some one coming.”

Mary’s ears had not deceived her. There was a sound of high voices, rapid steps—and laughing, then a loud, bold double knock on the door. In an instant the amazed girl had admitted Miss O’Moore, bare-headed, and in full evening dress—pale yellow satin, with diamonds in her hair, and an Eastern

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furred wrap thrown over her shoulders. She was followed by Captain Elton, also in evening dress, also bare-headed, for it was a warm September night.

“Well, Mary,” said the young lady, accosting her gaily, “we heard about the fiddle, by the second post just before dinner, and we came straight off here afterwards to tell you the news—we could not wait;” and she threw herself into a chair.

“And sure, Miss Addie, there was no hurry at all, at all,” protested Mary, eagerly.

“The violin is very valuable, and it is sold.”

“Sold; to think of that now! Thank ye, miss, kindly.”

“Sold for two hundred and fifty pounds.”

A pause of twenty full seconds, and then—

“Is it that old battered fiddle, as me father had for forty years? Ah! now, Miss Addie, ye were always full of your jokes—sure you are making game of me.”

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“I am not—ask Captain Elton here”—waving a dainty flashing hand in his direction.

“Yes, Mary, upon my honour, I have a cheque up at the house for you for two hundred and fifty pounds, the price of the fiddle, and you can come and fetch it, and take it to the bank to-morrow morning.”

“But, sure, sir, ye can’t be in earnest—the fiddle would be dear at half-a-crown!”

“That’s all you know about it! The violin is by a celebrated Italian maker, and very valuable. The price of it will come in nicely for your fortune;” and he looked significantly at Denis.

“Father, father!” screamed Mary, bursting into the room, “get up, and put on your duds, and come out, and hear the news.”

And old Joe, aroused from his first sleep, turned over in his bed, muttering angry ejaculations.

“The fiddle is sold for a whole heap of

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money! Miss Addie says so—she's here. Come, hurry out, hurry out."

In an astonishing time, for the words "a whole heap of money" had a magical effect, Joe tottered in among the company, rather sketchily attired, but blinking eagerly, and thoroughly wide awake. At first he absolutely refused to credit the evidence of his senses.

"'Tis draming I am still! Is it hundreds of pounds for the old fiddle? Ah, balderdash! wid respect to yer honor."

"Hundreds for Mary's fortune," put in Miss O'Moore, impressively. "What will you do with it, Mary? You have a great fortune."

"And Mary can take her pick of every boy in Kerry now!" supplemented Captain Elton.

Mary laughed, coloured violently, and glanced shyly at Denis, who had hitherto stood in the background, too stupefied for words.

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"Well, if it's as you say," said Joe, after a pause, "av coarse it's Mary's money, an' she can do as she likes wid it. I've enough for my wants; and it's yourself, Miss Addie, has been a good ganius. Good luck attend you, and may you and your gentleman have the richest of blessings on earth and heaven, and by land or sea, and rest in glory!"

* * * * *

As Miss O'Moore and her *fiancé* hurried back to the big house, to round games, and music, and less interesting company, the latter exclaimed—

"Well, there's one happy family in Ireland to-night.' The whole thing would have done for a play, and it was very nearly being a tragedy."

"Cuthbert, you are always thinking of plays and theatricals!"

"But it *was* quite a drama in real life!" he insisted. "First, there was Denis, who had

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evidently come to make his peace, and who was on the eve of departure to a foreign land, to seek his own and Mary's fortune. You will not deny that? Enter, unexpectedly, another happy pair, who bring the said fortune in their hands! Finally, the aged parent appears upon the scene, accords his consent to a match between the long separated, but now united lovers, and calls down a fervent blessing on both young couples.
Curtain."

The violin proved to be a rare discovery, a valuable Stradivarius, and was eagerly, nay, gratefully, purchased by an eminent violinist. He never tires of repeating its history—the story of its forty years' sojourn in the wilderness (that is to say, in an Irish cabin), its desecration by common, unskilled, and uncouth hands, its rendering of mere vulgar reels and jigs at weddings and wakes, its cobwebs, spiders, vicissitudes, and miseries! But now it has been restored to

its former proud estate, his own beloved and ever-treasured exquisitely toned Stradivarius!

Nevertheless, of the real true story of that fiddle, its complacent owner is ignorant. He does not know—nor would he perhaps care to hear—that it had been the means of introducing extraordinary harmony into a family; of making two handsome young people happy for life. Yes, that same old, dusty, despised violin that had long hung silent on the wall of Joe Shanahan's cottage, and whose strains now entrance appreciative audiences in all the great capitals of Europe.

* * * *

"Bedad, it's well to be yees, with a grand fortune, in an old cracked fiddle!" remarked Katty Kerwan, in a peevish tone, during an afternoon visitation. "And I hear as how a daler is tearing round the country, buying up every sort of ould musical instrument!"

"Is that so?" rejoined Mary, composedly.

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She was now stitching industriously at her own trousseau.

“Yes, and it’s all off with Anstey Casey and Denis, and he is going to take *you*, Mary, seeing you have now the biggest fortune ;” and she laughed — her little whinnying laugh.

Mary coloured furiously, but took no further notice of this undeniably nasty speech. She could afford to be silent now.

“And I’m told that Nanny Hurley was here herself on Sunday—no less—drawing down the match ! Well, it is no trouble *this* time—not like before, when Denis was going six ways at wance, whenever he caught sight of Anstey Casey ! Still and all, he’d have had to marry her, whether he would or no, his mother being a most detarmined woman ; but, as luck would have it, ye see, she has changed her tune, and all along of your father’s battered old fiddle.”

OLD LADY ANN.



OLD LADY ANN.

“So sleeps the pride of former days.”

MOORE.

THERE are some localities on the north side of Dublin from which fashion has ebbed many years: rows of forlorn, melancholy mansions, that were formerly the town houses of the Irish aristocracy. Showy coaches-and-four once waited at their now battered, blistered doors, crowds of liveried servants trooped up and down their shallow staircases; their panelled reception-rooms saw many jovial dances, reckless card-parties, and ceremonious balls. These were in the good old days when the gentry lived at home and spent their money in Ireland—now it is

the last country in the world in which they would choose to reside. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the neighbourhood, the street, began to what is called “go down;” one or two of the festive, red-faced old lords died, and their heirs promptly abandoned what they considered a gloomy barrack in a back slum in Dublin, and advertised it “to be let or sold.” Professional people replaced the nobility and landed gentry ; after a long pause, these again found the neighbourhood too old-fashioned—too far behind the age ; the mansions too large to maintain with a small staff of servants—for they were built in the times when the wages and food of retainers were cheap. When those three terrible golden balls appeared over the door of what had once been the Earl of Mountpatrick’s residence—a door accustomed to hatchments—then, in spite of temptingly low rents, the professional tenants became scared, and fled the

locality to a man ; the next drop was to lodging-houses, then to cheap tenements, lastly to empty rooms and forlorn hearthstones. The poor old houses were now merely so many dilapidated monuments of fallen greatness, with their shuttered windows and grimy shattered panes, their rusty railings and cavernous areas—choked with piles of canisters, broken bottles, and all the loose paper that the dusty wind had scattered through the street.

Rank grass sprouted underneath the hall doors, the ragged children of the neighbourhood held shops and weddings on their sunken steps. In the interior, the painted ceilings—some from the fair hand of Angelica Kaufmann—the sculptured mantel-pieces of Italian marble, the solid mahogany doors and richly carved balustrades—were ruthlessly stripped years ago, and now adorn various upstart modern residences in Saxon England. One end of Dennis Street was

almost submerged ; the houses stood gloomy, blind, abandoned ; their doors, as it were, closed for ever by the hand of pitiless decay. There were still a few tenements, notable for crowds of noisy, dirty children, and strings of ill-washed, ragged garments fluttering from their windows ; then came a dozen empty houses, flanked by a once palatial residence, which concluded that side of the thoroughfare.

I lodge at the opposite corner ; I am a young woman, a journalist—poor, single, self-supporting. I occupy what was once a magnificent drawing-room, with fine, stuccoed walls, carved cornices, and two superb white marble chimney-pieces—for this and attendance I pay the modest sum of six shillings a week. I have portioned^d my residence into a complete suite of apartments ; in the middle is my sitting-room, which displays a square of carpet, a round table, and a couple of chairs ; my bedroom stands behind

a screen. In one of the windows is my office ; here I have placed a big writing-table, a chair, a mat, the inevitable waste-paper basket, and here I work undisturbed. My outlook is on the big corner house, and as I pause, and meditate, and search for an elusive idea, I often stare interrogatively at the great blank windows opposite, and occasionally find myself wondering what has been the history of that splendid mansion ?—a nobleman's without doubt.

One afternoon in December, as it was beginning to grow dusk, and I sat pondering with the end of my penholder in my mouth, my gaze abstractedly fixed on the opposite hall door, I suddenly sat up and rubbed my eyes briskly. Was I dreaming, or did I behold that door opening ? Yes ; very gently, very gradually, and a little wizened old woman, wearing a black poke bonnet and shawl, and carrying a basket, emerged and tottered hastily down the steps.

She appeared bent and infirm, but nevertheless hurried away at a good pace. I actually lost half an hour watching for her return ; the street lamps were lit when she arrived and let herself in, as it were, by stealth, but no single glimmer of light subsequently illuminated one of those nineteen windows.

The next morning I cross-examined my landlady. I inquired if she "could tell me anything about the house opposite ?" and she, only too pleased to gossip, replied as she folded her arms :

" Oh, faix, then, it was a great house wance, the grandest for gaiety and squandering in the whole street ; it was Lord Kilmorna as owned it ; he had miles of estates in the west, and kep' royal style, outriders no less, but he spent all he had, and died wretchedly poor—the family has dwindled out completely—not a soul, nor a sod, nor a stone belonging to it ; unless the old house there, and that is in Chancery this forty year and more."

"But are there not people living in it?" I asked.

"I can't rightly tell you, miss; some will have it that it is haunted by a little old woman; others say a caretaker lives somewhere in the back, but I'm here this ten year, and I never saw no sign of her; no food, nor coal ever goes near the place, so how could she keep body and soul together at all? and forby that, the rats would ate her! The door is never opened from year's end to year's end. Look at the grass, ye could feed a horse on them steps! Sure, there is stories about every old house in the street—terrifying stories."

"Are there, indeed — what sort of stories?"

"Of murders, and marriages, and duels, and hangings, and shootings, and gamblings, and runaway matches——" she rattled off with extraordinary volubility. "They say of number thirteen, that a man gambled with

the ould wan himself—and for the price of his soul. Oh, you'd lose your life with fright at some of the tragedies they put out regarding the street. I don't believe them myself; anyway, the houses is chape, and well built, and will stand a thousand years yet."

About a fortnight after this interview I was returning home from a weary and bootless expedition. It was a wet, dark night as I got out of the nearest tram, and passing through a narrow street I stopped at a baker's to buy a cake for my frugal tea. An old woman stood at the counter, and I instantly recognized the bonnet and shawl from opposite. She was saying in a thin, tremulous voice :

"Oh, Mrs. Bergin, I came out without my purse——"

"Faix, you are *always* doing that!" was the brusque reply.

"And if you would only trust me with a

loaf, until to-morrow, I would be so much obliged," she pleaded faintly.

"Now, Miss Seager, I dare say you would indeed, and I'd be obliged if you'd pay me the bill that is running on here month in and month out. How do you think us poor people is to live at all—tell me that—if they have to keep supplying paupers for nothing? and look at the poor rates!"

"I am very sorry, indeed," stammered a weak, quavering voice—a lady's—"but we have been disappointed in some payments due to us, we have, indeed, or you should have had your money long ago, and the very day we receive our remittances you shall be paid."

"An' that will be Tibb's eve"—scornfully; "live horse and you'll get grass! Anyhow, you'll get no more bread here—sorra a crumb."

"Oh, Mrs. Bergin, just trust me—this once."

"Come, that's enough, and I can't be losing me whole day talking to beggars; why don't you go into the House?"

Could this be civil Mrs. Bergin, who always had a gay word for me?—but, then, *I was a cash customer!*

I caught a glimpse of the little, miserable, white face at the bottom of the black poke. Oh, what an expression of want, despair, famine!

On the impulse of the moment I spoke and said—

"I understand that you have left your purse at home; will you allow me to be your banker for the present; I think we are neighbours. I live just opposite you—at Number 17—and you can repay me when you please," and I offered her half a crown.

"I have no change," she faltered, almost in tears. "Oh, it's too much to borrow—I may—" And she paused, struggling with emotion.

"You'll never see it again, miss, and so I tell you," volunteered Mrs. Bergin, as she picked out a yesterday's twopenny loaf.

"I will pay you, indeed I will," resumed the old lady in a firmer voice. "Mrs. Bergin, I will take a stale twopenny, a pound of oatmeal, and three rusks."

As she turned to choose them, I nodded good night, and stepped out once more into the dark street.

Two days later Mrs. Grogan flung open the door of my suite, saying, as she wiped the suds from her bare red arms :

"A person to see you, miss," and the old lady from opposite shuffled into the room. She was shrunken, small, frail, and oh, so shabby! How her shawl was held together by darns, her thin shoes patched, her gloves (odd ones), I refrain from describing these, for they represented the very last gasp of expiring gentility.

"I brought you the money you kindly

advanced me," she said, tendering the half-crown, which was neatly wrapped in paper, "and I am vastly obliged to you."

"Won't you sit down?" I said, offering her my one spare seat.

"I am much obliged to you," she reiterated in a formal manner, "but I never pay calls now; we—don't visit; I only just stepped across—" She hesitated. I saw her wandering eye fixed on my fat brown tea-pot, and instantly—guiltily—withdrewn. That timid glance had told a tale! I was determined to take no denial—accept no excuse.

"You must stay and have a cup of tea with me," I urged. "Indeed, I shall be quite hurt if you decline. I am so lonely—it will be a great favour if you remain and keep me company. See, my tea-pot is on the hob."

"Well—really—since you are so pressing," she murmured, slowly seating herself, and proceeding to draw off her gloves—a pro-

ceeding which demanded the most cautious manipulation. I noticed her hands—they were beautifully shaped, but emaciated and worn with hard, coarse work, precisely like the hands of a charwoman !

“ Let me see,” she said, looking about her with a familiar air. “ It is fifty years since I was in this drawing-room—not since the old judge’s time. He was a great wit, and a great card-player.”

“ There have been changes in the neighbourhood since then, have there not ? ” I remarked.

“ Changes ! Indeed, you may well say so ! and I have seen them. I recollect when six titled people lived in this very street. I am close on ninety—too old, my dear ! I hope you may never live to such an inhuman age—and I hope it in all kindness.”

Ninety ! Yes, her face was wrinkled beyond anything imaginable—a wrinkle for a year—but the features were refined, not to

say aristocratic, and her eyes were bright and animated. I made haste to pour her out a good cup of tea, and handed her some buttered toast (my own especial luxury). How she relished the tea, poor old soul! With what tremulous avidity she put it to her lips, and swallowed every drop! Surely it was months since she had tasted the woman's comforter and friend. A second cup had the effect of loosening her tongue and thawing her heart completely.

"My childie, you are very good to me," she said, with a timid smile. "Have you no one belonging to you, and how long have you lived here?"

"I have lived here more than a year. I have no relations in this country, but I have a brother in Australia, who is married."

"And why do you live here, dearie, in God-forgotten Dennis Street?"

"Because it suits my purse," I frankly replied. "I am very poor."

"Poor?"—with a queer little laugh.
"Darling child, I don't suppose *you* know
what poverty means! How do you pass
your time?"

"I work for my living; I write for
magazines and papers."

"You write! Well, times are altered!
In my young days, people would have been
shocked to see a personable young woman
living alone, and writing for the papers.
You have seen better days, dear?"

"No, not much better," I candidly replied.
"My father was a poor curate; he had a
hundred and twenty pounds a year, and no
private means. There was my mother, my
brother, and myself—it was not much, when
my brother had to be educated and put out
in the world."

"No—and where did you live?"

"At Carra, in the West."

"Ah, the West, with its seas and sun-
sets!"—and her old eyes glowed. "I was

reared out there, before your father was born. *I* have seen better days—carriages and outriders, liveried servants, a pack of hounds, why, we burned wax candles in the kitchen, and kept eleven gardeners. But I'm sure you think I'm a doddering old idiot to talk like this! Well, *we* have come down in the world sadly—Ann and I—Lady Ann—and I— Yes," lowering her voice, "she is my first cousin; we were always like sisters; we live in the house opposite. Don't breathe it, dear, but we have been there this five years. We keep as quiet as mice. It is the old family town house, and we may as well be there as anywhere, no one wants it. Hush! and I'll whisper it. Lady Ann's father was the Earl of Kilmorna. My father was his brother—I am his niece, Lucinda Seager. Now," drawing herself up, "who would think it? We two old bodies are the last of the line. The earl, my uncle, kept great state, even when he

was a ruined man. His son gambled and drank—and—died abroad—imbecile. Ann was never what you might call bright; she had a moderate fortune, and she and I lived in a small way out West. We had a neat little place too, and nice neighbours, and Ann was made a good deal of. However, troubles came; our small investments were swept away; and whilst we travelled to Dublin, to see about them, our belongings were seized and sold up, and we were ashamed to go back. We had a few pounds left, and some old heirlooms, and we stayed in town until we—we had no money at all, and then we came and crept into the old house; we had the keys, you see, and we pretend that we are dead. Oh, God Almighty knows I wish we were——” And she broke down and sobbed—hard, chill, tearless sobs.

It is the saddest thing in the world to see an old woman cry !

"We have no income at all," she resumed, "only eleven pounds a year—interest in the funds ; it dies with me ; but with medicine and food, and firing, it does not go far."

"Have you no friends ?" I inquired, somewhat timidly.

"No one—we have outlived them all ; you see, dear, it is not always a blessing to grow old."

"The clergyman," I suggested, almost in a whisper.

"Do you think we would let any one know that Lady Ann, an earl's daughter, was brought so low ? Ann is proud, oh, terribly proud ! She has a few things that, if she would only part with them, would fetch money, but she says she will have them buried in her coffin."

"Can you not persuade her to dispose of them ?"

"I've tried and tried times and again, but it's no use. My things went long ago ; but she has an old gold watch and chain, a silver

bowl, and spoons and forks, some lace and pearls, but what is the good of thinking of them, dear ? She would *give* them to a friend, with a heart and a half, but would never take money for them, never. She would die sooner than sell them."

" And I suppose you have no books, or papers, or flowers, or anything, and rarely go out ? "

" Books, papers ! My child, I haven't seen one for months. The world is as dead to us as we are to the world ; as to flowers, I almost forget the look of them, and, oh ! we were so fond of them, and had such a lovely little garden ! All our time is spent in trying to sleep, to keep ourselves warm, and to obtain a little food ; and we go over old days in the dark, by the hour. I think the thought of what we once were, keeps life in us still."

" Have no letters ever come to you ? "

" One or two, but we always sent them

to the dead letter office. We could not, for shame's sake, let people dream we had fallen so low—and two penniless old women are soon forgotten. Now you know our secret. Your kind face, and your warm hospitality, have opened my lips, and"—rising as she spoke—"I must go, with a thousand thanks."

"If you would like my paper any day," I said, "you are most welcome to it."

"Oh yes, if you would slip it in the letter-box, after dark, what a pleasure it would give us!"

"And here is a *Graphic* you can take and keep, and I am sure I can send you over some books."

"Oh, you are far too good, too good! I am ashamed to be under such obligations to you. God bless you!" And she tottered downstairs, and across the street.

About a week later, I received a three-cornered note, written on a half-sheet of yellow paper; it proved to be an invitation

—a rare occurrence for me—and ran as follows :—

“Lady Ann and Miss Lucinda Seager request the pleasure of Miss Smith’s company at tea at six o’clock, at 75 Dennis Street.”

Could I believe my eyes? Of course, I would accept with pleasure. At six o’clock to the second, I went over and rang the bell; how rusty it was, and stiff! I heard it clanging and echoing through the empty house, and then feeble steps coming slowly along a passage.

Presently the door was opened by Miss Lucinda, with a dip-candle in her hand. She beamed upon me as she said—

“I coaxed her to dispose of one or two small things, and we are better off now. She’s in the library.”

Miss Lucinda ushered me across a hall (out of which rose a ghostly stone stair-

case), along a corridor, and into an immense back room, extremely lofty. There was a candle, a tiny fire, a sofa, a little furniture, and, in a very imposing chair, an imposing old lady—thin, fragile, dignified, and considerably younger than my acquaintance. She wore a priceless yellow lace scarf over an exceedingly shabby old gown. Tea was laid on a small table, with a newspaper for cloth ; I noticed a sixpenny cake and some dry toast.

“ My cousin has mentioned you to me,” said Lady Ann, “ and I thought I should like to make your acquaintance, and thank you for the papers”—with an air of easy patronage. “ You have given us great entertainment. We are two lonely gentle-women who live quite out of the world. Lucinda ”—peremptorily—“ you can make the tea.”

Lucinda was evidently her cousin’s slave. She waited on Lady Ann as if she was a queen,

and attended to all her observations, with what seemed to me unreasonable deference. Lady Ann did the honours as if presiding at a royal banquet, whilst we sipped our tea and nibbled at our stale sponge-cake. She prattled incessantly, and I feasted my eyes on the massive old snuffers and spoons, also on a superbly embossed jug and sugar-bowl. Why, the silver on the table was probably worth forty shillings an ounce, and these proud people preferred to starve rather than part with the family heirlooms. Then, as we drew round the scanty fire, they began to ply me with eager questions. The two shrill old voices often rose simultaneously on either hand, demanding news of the outer world. What had become of the Roxcrofts ? Was her ladyship dead ? Had Marion Lascelles married ? Who lived in Grandmore Castle ? Who won the great Lynch law-suit, and who had come in for old Sir Corrie's money ? I could not answer half

of these interrogations. I was, however, able to impart many items of more general news. Royal weddings, deaths, births, of wars, new inventions, new literary lights, ay, and new fashions. I discoursed for the best part of an hour and gradually unfolded the latest intelligence of the present day, whilst they, on their part, recalled many stories of the past. How I longed for a note-book or a good memory! I heard all particulars of the grand ball that had been given in the house on Lady Ann's sixteenth birthday ; of the routs and dinners among their own set ; of the runaway match from number twenty-two, and the duel fought with small swords at number five.

This was not my last visit by any means. I went over to see my old ladies about once a week (not to tea). Generally there was a fire—always a dip-candle. I was permitted to explore the house. I shudder now, when I recall the ghostly double

drawing-room, with an immense mirror, casting weird reflections—a fixture in the wall. I shiver when I think of the vast empty rooms, the dark passages and mysterious powder closets, the awful underground regions, the dripping damp kitchens, the crumbling stables, and the decaying pear-tree, that in a storm sullenly lashed itself against the library windows, as much as to say, "Let me come in."

Ultimately I became a favourite with Lady Ann. I brought her news, books, and papers—she had marvellous sight. I also ventured to present her with fruit, a down cushion, knitted mittens, and a shawl. These she accepted with an air of lofty condescension, that had a humbling effect on me; however, that she did accept them was satisfactory, even though I was sensible that every additional unworthy offering was an additional liberty.

One afternoon I noticed an air of myste-

rious importance in Miss Lucinda's manner as she admitted me.

"Ann wants to see you particularly," she said. "This is her birthday—her eighty-fourth, and she is giving herself a little treat."

This little treat, I was soon made aware, was to take the form of a presentation to *me*.

"My dear Jessie," said Lady Ann, embracing me. "We want to make *you* a trifling present in honour of the day—it is the only pleasure that it is now in our power to enjoy. Here is my birthday gift," handing me a good-sized, untidy paper parcel, containing some hard substance. "It belonged to my grandfather—Louis XVI. gave it to him—and I present it to you."

I opened the package carefully, and discovered the silver jug—richly worked, and embossed with lilies and the royal arms of France. Miss Lucinda had evidently given it a polish for the occasion.

My first impulse was to return it on the spot, but second thoughts prevailed, and I kissed Lady Ann, and offered her my warmest thanks. "It was ten thousand times too good of her," I declared, "and I valued it more than I could express."

But Miss Lucinda and I subsequently conferred together on the subject in the cold outer hall. "Of course I don't mean to keep it. I shall get a great price for it, and bring you the money," I whispered eagerly.

"Of course you *will* keep it," cried Miss Lucinda. "It's not as if we had any heirs. I was delighted when she thought of it. She can't bear being under a compliment, and, besides, she is so fond of you. Kilmorna always used it for his punch—for the hot water. It's a handsome jug."

"It is. Nevertheless I intend to dispose of it as I have said."

"And is that how you treat our present?

Are we fallen so low that you'd sell our little gift and give us back the money in charity." And she burst out crying.

"Now, Miss Lucinda—my dear Miss Lucinda," I pleaded, putting my arm round her neck. "I look to you to be sensible. Lady Ann is simply wickedly generous. You both want, oh so many things, and you have suffered so much—so much—"

"God Almighty only knows how much!" she sobbed.

"And whilst you have no blankets, no fire, and scarcely food, Lady Ann gives an heirloom to a stranger that is worth fifty pounds! If I may not have my own way, I shall take it back to her this instant. Now, dear Miss Lucinda," I coaxed, "be reasonable; you shall give me some little gift, but I would be a mean, dishonourable, abominable wretch—if I accepted the Louis Seize jug."

It took a long time to convince Miss

Lucinda. We stood and argued face to face for twenty minutes in that vault-like hall. In the end I conquered, and she relented; and in the course of a week I brought her by stealth no less a sum than thirty pounds. I had hoped for more, but to Miss Lucinda it seemed a fortune.

"How am I to account for it?" she demanded. "Just think of all the lies I must tell! What am I to say? She knows I have only ninepence in the whole wide world."

"Say it's restitution money!" was my glib reply. "And so it is. I am restoring you your own."

"Well, childie, 'tis you that are clever! I'd never have thought of that—and it's no lie. Many and many a twenty pound was clipped from us in the old days, and we never missed it. Ann will easily credit that the priests, or people's own consciences, have worked on them, and they have sent us back our own."

Luckily for me, Lady Ann proved easily deceived, and received the restitution money with sobs of delight. I now learnt that she was a true Kilmorna. If she had had her will, that thirty pound would have been squandered in three days. She talked of black silk dresses, of papering and painting the house, and a box at the theatre!

I really began to fear that the money had turned her poor brain, till Miss Lucinda assured me privately "that Ann had very extravagant ideas, and as long as she was mistress of one shilling, she was always ready to lay out a thousand."

Miss Seager and I made a joint expedition to the shops on the strength of that same restitution money. We invested in a cheap screen, as a shelter from draughts from the door. We honourably paid the baker. We laid in no less than a whole ton of coals. We also purchased a square of drugget, a lamp, a table-cover, blankets, tinned soups,

tea, candles, and various other luxuries. In the course of time—that is to say within the space of twelve months—I had been affectionately endowed with a lace scarf, a gold repeater, six two-pronged forks, and a set of seals; and my two old ladies—thanks to restitution money—were in comparatively affluent circumstances.

Mrs. Grogan, my landlady, “could not make out of what sort of a fancy,” as she expressed it, “I had taken to the old beggar of a caretaker, who, it appeared after all, *did* live opposite;” but I neither noticed her hints, nor gratified her curiosity.

“Ann loves you,” Miss Seager assured me; “but you must never breathe our secret to a soul—the mere idea of such a thing, the hint you gave her of writing to our lawyer, nearly brought on a paralytic stroke. We can do finely now. I have what will carry me on for many months, and in great style. We can afford a bit of meat some-

times—I toast it at the fire on a fork—and eggs, and soups, and port wine; and it's all thanks to you, dear, and your cunning restitutions. The old pearls, and her mother's rings, and miniature, and a rose diamond brooch, are almost all Ann has left; and she will never give them away, not even to you, whilst the breath is in her; but they are bequeathed to you in her will. There are still the spoons, and we can live on them for a good while, if they fetch the same fine prices, dear. Now that money is off my mind, there is another load on my heart, and it frightens me. If I was to die—and I'm ninety-one, and a wonder for my age—what will happen to Ann? Who is to cook for her, and do for her, keep her in spirits and company, and care for her? It—will have to be—you." And she nodded her head at me with solemn emphasis. "Look now what a burden you have brought on yourself, and all through lending me half a crown! Well, my heart,

God in heaven will have it all in store for you for what you have been—and done, for two poor old women."

* * * * *

A few days after this conversation, I unexpectedly found myself on board one of the Orient line, *en route* for Australia. My brother's wife was dead, and he had telegraphed for me to come to him immediately. That startling little slip of pink paper, how suddenly it had changed my life, and my plans!

I remained eighteen months in the Antipodes, nursing my brother through a tedious illness. After his death, I turned my face homewards, with his little orphan girl to whom I was guardian. I was no longer a poor journalist. I need not work for my daily bread, nor live in such a "low" quarter as "Dennis Street." I was an heiress now.

I had written to my two old ladies, to a

prearranged address, but received no reply. This, however, caused me no uneasiness. I knew that they feared discovery and the postman, and had suffered their art of letter-writing to be lost. The morning I arrived in Dublin, my very first visit was to them. I walked from the tram, straight to number seventy-five, and knocked and rang — no answer—saving the echoes. Knock, knock, knock—dead silence—an oppressive, expressive silence. Then I repaired to my old quarters, and interviewed Mrs. Grogan. After a warm and effusive reception—

“So you are looking for those old people, are you? Oh!” she said, “sure, they are both dead—the creatures!”

“Both dead!” I repeated incredulously.

“Why, yes; the little old woman was run over by a car, and taken to Jervis Street Hospital. She was terribly anxious about a hand-bag she had with her—she said it was full of valuables—pearls and rings; but

the deuce a bit of it was to be found—if she ever had it; and she was in an awful state about her cousin, Lady Ann, who lived over here in this street. They thought the poor old body was raving mad; but anyhow she died, calling with her last breath for Lady Ann!

“Some people suspicioned there might be something in what she said, and looked up the house after a couple of days, and found there, sure enough, an aged woman, starving and crazy. She declared she was Lady Ann—a queer sort of Lady Ann! There was nothing to eat, nor a sign of a copper in the place, and as she had no one owning her, they just took her off to the union. She was raging; and went screaming through the streets that she was an earl’s daughter! but sure no one minded her, the poor, unfortunate, cracked creature! They put her in the infirmary, she was so miserable and feeble, not fit to scrub or to

do a hand's turn. They were kind folks, and humoured the bothered old beggar, and called her 'your ladyship,' for that was the only thing that seemed to ease her mind at all. She died about six weeks ago, and was buried as a pauper—old *Lady Ann!*"

TIM BRADY'S BOOTS.



TIM BRADY'S BOOTS.

“The ruling passion, be it what it will,
The ruling passion conquers reason still.”

POPE.

“Who's to have these?” inquired the lady visitor of an outside ragged-school in Dublin; and as she spoke, she held aloft a pair of exceedingly neat, brown, laced boots. Forty eager faces were raised to them approvingly, there was a breathless silence for the space of half a minute, and then a voice rejoined—

“There's Joe Fagin. No, he'd be too big; an Davy Mooney—augh, sure I forgot the unfortunate gorsoon has but one foot,

and there's no call to be wasting a boot! Well, then, Tim Brady, they'd be about his size, and Tim has been living pretty well in the back. Come here to me, Tim."

Tim, blushing, ragged, and barefooted, rose and stepped forth from a crowded form, his eyes wistfully fastened on the prize, and shining with expectation.

They were beautiful dark-blue eyes, with curling black lashes, and put in, as they say in Ireland, "with a dirty finger"—but for that matter, dirty fingers appeared to have arranged every feature in Tim's small pallid face. He was a pretty, slight, genteel-looking boy, surprisingly undersized for his age (ten years), dressed in a greasy velveteen jacket, pinned across him, and wide open at the neck, not to say *décolleté*, and a pair of corduroy trousers that were held together by a bold scheme of patches.

The boots that were to be worn with this attire were real Russia leather (Bond Street

make), a misfit for some wealthy child. Such boots had never been seen in the school, although many curious and incongruous articles had found their way thither. Startling, indeed, were some of the contents of the parcels of cast-off garments—a pink satin ball dress, a yellow domino, a mess jacket, and a solar topee had each in their turn awakened pangs of envy and amazement. At the present moment every eye was concentrated on Tim Brady, and Tim's gaze was centred on the brown boots. When they were held towards him, he seized upon them with such tremulous eagerness that he let one fall. He was scarlet and speechless between pride and confusion.

"Whether can't ye say '*thank ye*,' ye good-for-nothing, mannerless bosthoon?" demanded the monitress, indignantly. "Can't ye get it out of yer mouth nohow?"

"Thank ye," he stammered, without even raising his eyes. Then, clasping his treasures

tightly in his arms, he hurried out to the entry, and sat down on the lower step of the outer stair, to taste the supreme joy of trying on. Yes, they might have been made for him ; the boots were just his size !

As he stretched his feet out before him, and surveyed them with a beaming and complacent countenance, a tall, ragged boy, who leant against the wall with his hands in his pockets (two holes so called), remarked—

“ Faix an they are an elegant fit entirely, Tim. Wait till yer mother gets a hold of them ; they’ll be the price of a fine drink for herself and yer gran—— ”

“ Oh ! ”—and an expression of pitiable dismay settled down on Tim’s half-starved face—“ Oh, begor, and so they will. Patsey Lynch, yer a clever wan ; can ye tell me what will I do at all, at all ? ”

“ Don’t let them have sight, or light, av them is my advice ; ye lave them hid somewhere hereabouts, and wear them in school

—better *that* than not getting wearing them anywhere!"

Patsey—an incipient "corner boy," a sharp, idle scapegrace—was in a way Tim's patron, and though he occasionally kicked him and knocked him about, he objected to others sharing that privilege, for all the world was well aware that "Tim the wheel" got bad enough "trament" from his own people—in Curran's Rents.

Patsey's wise counsel was promptly adopted—the boots were carefully wrapped in a large piece of blotting-paper (stolen), and secreted in a hole in the wall every day after school hours, their owner returning home barefoot. However, he wore the boots as he repeated his lessons, and keeping his eyes fixed on their beauty, apparently drew from them inspiration and intelligence. Had he known French, surely his motto would have been *à propos des bottes*. In play hours they furnished him with confidence and self-

respect ; he could kick (and *hurt*) now, and he so pleased ; but Tim was not a warlike urchin. Of his own accord, he daily washed his head and hands, and he obtained a new pair of trousers—whole, if somewhat shrunken—in exchange for a railway rug dropped off a car. In short, he endeavoured to live up to his extremities ; his boots were the making of Tim Brady. On Sundays only were they exhibited in public, and it was a joke among his friends that Tim attended first Mass at Marlborough Street Chapel, and subsequently paraded O'Connell's Bridge solely in order to display his possessions ; and it was but few that he deemed worthy to accompany the wearer of such a pair. The boots even influenced his life at home ; he clamoured for a piece of soap, he objected to share his lair with casual rabbits, and he had become quite extravagant in the matter of clean water. His mother could not “suspicion” what ailed him, and said over and over to

her neighbours that "in troth Tim was striving hard to be a gentleman, and she could not make out what ever had come to him, unless the head of him was not right."

Mrs. Brady, and her mother, Mrs. Corcoran, lived in a tenement house in the Black Pits, where they were both known as "heavy drinkers," and spent most of their leisure hours brawling bare-armed, and holding excited personal discussions at the street corner; and were frequently to be met, coming out of the Three Pikes, wiping their mouths on the backs of their hands, as the door swung behind them. Mrs. Corcoran was a shrivelled, wrinkled old hag, whose pale, respectable countenance—a most deceitful countenance—brought her in a revenue of from eight to twelve shillings a week. *She* was the miserable old widow, in a thin black shawl, who carried a glass dish in her hand to baffle the police, and whose low-voiced, agonized appeals had

wrung not a few half-crowns from tender-hearted ladies. Indeed, it was on record, that one charitable dame was so unexpectedly "touched," that, having but little money with her, she rang at a friend's door and borrowed a sovereign from the butler, in order to bestow it on the poor decent widow "who had lost her husband off a ladder, and her two fine sons at sea, and had not one soul in God's wide world belonging to her." Practice made perfect. Mrs. Corcoran had, moreover, a valuable dramatic instinct, and, solely on these occasions, a nice address. Therefore she begged with extraordinary success (it was her *métier*), and prospered. Her only child, Mrs. Julia Brady, had been a soldier's wife — not married on the strength. She was a powerfully built, stout woman, with a shiny red face, bold black eyes, and the owner of a tongue that had no rival, no, not even in the Black Pits. She supported herself by

rabbits and charing, and bragged that "she could earn her dinner and half a crown a day, when in the humour." Mrs. Brady generally wore a black skirt (one of a series), a dirty, red flannel body, and a large, checked apron—an apron so commodious, that it once concealed a pair of blankets and a frying-pan. Her treatment of Tim was notable for alternate spells of fondness and ferocity—unfortunately the former was of rare occurrence. Tim evidently resembled his late father, Pat Brady, who (mercifully for himself) had died young. His home was on the third floor back of a tenement, once a fine mansion; now its area was boarded in—to keep down the rats—its worn doorstep was level with the pavement.

The interior was the filthy abode of various idle, good-for-nothing slatterns, some of whom pawned their husband's Sunday clothes regularly every Monday; and might often be seen, with half-naked infants in

their arms, shouting, and beating with bare hands upon the doors of public-houses, after hours.

Mrs. Brady's back room, with its never-opened window, contained a wooden bed on three legs and a precarious support of brick, a table, two chairs, a kettle, a few plates and cups, and an ancient piano-stool—screwed up into, as it were, a note of interrogation—and evidently much surprised at its company. There was also a heap of shavings for Tim's couch, and a quantity of rabbits, who lived in candle-boxes, canisters, or at large. Poor Tim ! The boots, paradoxical as it sounds, had put ideas into his *head*. He indulged in a wild dream of a pair of socks, had visions of a whole, clean shirt, and angrily turned the rabbits out of his bed—save one, a black-and-white doe, an ancient friend. Tim was making progress at school ; his teacher was pleased with him, but the boys in his division began to mutter among themselves,

that "Tim was getting too stuck-up entirely —what between being in the third book, and his beautiful boots——"

Their criticisms were merely seasoned with envy—it remained, alas ! for a girl to supply the hatred and malice. The simple cause of their envy was this: many articles of clothing were delivered, and distributed among the children; but for the most part these gifts went straight to the pawn-office, and thence to the public-house; and the fact of Tim Brady retaining and wearing his boots week after week, was a source of many not unnatural heart-burnings. It was, in the end, a small piece of slate-pencil which led to his undoing.

He furiously disputed its possession with one Biddy Rogan—a girl of twelve, who lived on his own staircase—and the quarrel ran high. Biddy modelled her language on that of her fellow-lodgers.

Tim retaliated by calling her a red-headed

skin-the-goat, and that ugly, that if she was to stand in a field no crow would come within a mile of her, and Bob Connolly said so. Biddy Rogan was excessively sensitive about her hair, and as vain as she was ill-favoured. She glared at him in silence, her nostrils widely distended, her face working with passion, her hands suddenly clenched. Could Bob Connolly have said it? No, it was a lie. Anyway she would pay out Tim Brady, and that in style.

"Just you wait, my boy!" she gobbled in a choked voice. "Just you *wait!*" and wrapping her arms tightly in her pinafore—a certain sign of strong emotion—she turned on her heel and stalked off.

His betrayal took place that self-same afternoon, and in this fashion :

Mrs. Brady was seated on—and blocking up—the bottom step of the stairs ; she was resting her elbows on her knees, her chin

in her hands, and looking both sodden and sullen. Money was short.

Biddy, who was descending, sidled timidly towards her; secretly she feared this big, black-browed woman, who was known to have a heavy arm, and enjoyed the reputation of having given a policeman a "cruel mauling." Mrs. Brady moved aside, about the space of two inches, in order to allow the girl to pass ; but instead of passing, Biddy paused, and remarked, in her most conciliatory key—

"Well, an isn't them the grand boots of Tim's, Mrs. Brady!"

"*What* boots, ye snipe-faced toad?" grunted the matron, looking up from under her thick eyebrows.

"Why, them elegant Russia leather pair, as was give him a long while back. Ye got a lovely smell off av them——"

"Sight nor smell, sorra wan of me knows about them!"

"Faix then, every wan at school knows

them *well*, and can't help it ; he is that proud, he has his feet stuck in every wan's road ! Maybe it's too fine they are for Curran's Rents;" and she giggled.

"The nasty little savage brat, that never let on to his own mother!" burst out Mrs. Brady ; "and tell me, dear, are they any sort of good at all?" And she raised herself from her crouching posture, and sat erect.

"Good is it ! They are good for a pound at laste, over at Cohen's. They must have cost a power of money—they are raal Russia leather, same as that purse—you—you—found."

"By the powers of Moll Kelly, what sort of talk is this ye are telling me ?"—struggling heavily to her feet.

"It's true, Mrs. Brady dear"—with an air of conscious virtue.

"And how will I ever get a hoult of them ? I don't like this little ingenuity at

all ; it's too cute Tim is growing entirely, and just the very spit of his father ! How can I circumvent him, Biddy darlin' ? ”

“ Oh, I lave that to yourself, Mrs. Brady ; but the boots is worth a sovereign.”

“ A sovereign ! and me that hasn't had the feel of that much money in me hand wance in ten years. Say nothing, me jewel ; I'll give you threepence for yourself, and I'll squeeze the boots out av him yet ! ” And she nodded her head so impressively that her great shock of hair shook like a mop. “ Oh, the desateful, upsetting little baste ! Now I see what he was afther, as clear as print— coaxing for a pair of *socks* ! Wance I get the boots off av him, I'll tache him—I'll massacree him ! ”

Biddy Rogan grinned back approval, and confident that she could not have placed her revenge in better hands, skipped out into the street well pleased. Here almost the first person she met was Tim himself,

walking with great precaution, and carrying something in a jug.

"Ye little double-faced fox, where's yer boots—yah!" and she danced round and round him—did he but know it, a dance of triumph and death!

Meanwhile, Mrs. Brady slowly turned the information over in her mind, with the dull devilry of a heavy, yet cunning nature. She was almost affectionate to Tim that evening, and he fared sumptuously on cow-heel, a taste of porter, and the end of a loaf. The very next morning, old Mrs. Corcoran burst into the school, right in the middle of the spelling lesson.

"Timothy Brady!" she screeched; "and where's our Tim, at all, at all?"

Tim was at the top of his class, wearing his boots with his usual complacency.

"Tim, boy, yer mother is dying!" shrieked the beldame, with frenzy in her eyes, and her scanty white locks all adrift. "Come off

at wance ; she is on the last, and the priest sent for."

"How? What has happened? Has she met with an accident?" asked the teacher; "just wait a moment, and explain."

But all the answer she could obtain was a hearty curse—"And would ye keep the poor child from his dying mother, ye unnatural nagress?" And the old woman departed in hot haste, dragging her whimpering grandson in her train.

At four o'clock that afternoon Tim's teacher called round in Curran's Passage to inquire for Mrs. Brady.

She discovered Tim sitting on the doorstep, barefooted, his white face streaked with dirty tears, a truly woe-begone, ragged, snivelling little gutter boy. He had lost his self-esteem ; it had departed with his boots.

"How is your mother, Tim?" inquired the visitor.

"She's finely," he sobbed, burying his head on his knees.

"But I thought she was dying this morning?"

"Only dying for a sup of whisky," put in Pat, who lounged against the rails. "She's drinking his boots now"—glancing at Tim's bare feet. At the mere mention of their loss, his small toes appeared to curl piteously round one another. "She got six shillings on them at Cohen's," pursued Pat. "Oh, *she's a terror!*"

To which a shrill voice from a window just over the door, added—

"She's a show, and a scandal, and a disgrace to the street! Sure, wasn't she within a stone's throw of being hung—the time she nearly knocked the head off Mrs. Blake with the saucepan?"

An interested idle crowd was rapidly collecting to discuss the situation. Ponderous women were descending steps, loud voices

were raised. The teacher, who was young and timid, bent down, whispered a kind word or two to Tim, pushed a penny into his small, hot palm, and fled. Poor Tim! there was no supper for him that evening. He crept in among the shavings, and, comforted by the black-and-white rabbit, soon cried himself into the land of dreams.

At eleven o'clock he was awakened by the noisy return of his grandmother and mother, accompanied by another woman. Mrs. Brady's black eyes were blazing, her face deeply congested with liquor. With trembling hands she lit the candle, and then glared around her den.

"Look here"—fumbling in her pocket, and producing a shilling—"we may as well make an end of it. I laughed so much at that song of Kelly's I'm as dry as a lime-kiln. We will have another half-quartern before ye go, Mrs. Lundy dear! And Tim

there shall fetch it. Get up out of that"—rousing him with a shove of her foot. "Do ye see this?"—holding up the shilling with a grin. "It's the last of your *boots*, and ye shall have the satisfaction of laying it out yerself. I can't say fairer nor that!"

Tim gazed at the coin with an air of sullen resentment.

"Do ye hear me? Take the jug and go over now to the Pikes at wance. Stir your stumps, or they'll be shut! Are ye deaf?"—suddenly pouncing down, and dragging him to his feet by the collar of his coat.

He gazed steadily at the jug, at the shilling, finally at her, with a look of pale defiance, and then said, in a small but dogged voice—

"I am not going."

Here was rebellion! Mrs. Brady glared at him for a second as if unable to realize his meaning, then fell upon him with all

her force, and shook him by both shoulders as if she were shaking an empty sack.

"No—devil a step," he gasped.

"Then step to the devil," she shrieked, consumed by a rage for more drink, and a merciless fury against the weak little creature who dared to oppose her.

Years of bad gin had brutalized Mrs Brady. She looked as if she had gone mad; and with her swollen crimson face, her eyes rolling wildly in her head, she was a sight terrible to see.

"Ah, can't ye leave him alone, Julia, and not be knockin him about?" cried Mrs. Lundy, with maudlin good nature.

"I can't leave him alone, Betty!" she panted, in choked, fierce accents. Now catching Tim by his slender throat, she dashed his head against the wall. Another violent jerk whirled him against the old window. The crazy frail sash gave way, there was a sound of bursting wood and

crackling glass, a faint startled cry, a pause of one second, and then a sickening thud on the pavement in the backyard.

Vainly had Mrs. Brady grasped at Tim's ragged coat. The rags remained in her clutch, whilst the child fell from the height of three stories upon the cruel stone flags. In a miraculously short time there were sounds of shuffling feet, of loud exclamations, and then a crowd of eyes, filled with horror, pity, or mere morbid curiosity, peering at the limp little figure that lay with white upturned face beneath the glare of a policeman's lantern.

"Fell out of the window playing, did he?"

"Sure she was mad drunk and threw him out! She has been drinking all day!"

"He's as dead as a door nail!"

"No, he's not; he has the breath in him still."

"Take him to the hospital."

"What's the good? he's gone," were a

few of the remarks made by the crowd that had pressed and struggled to force their way into the tiny yard.

Finally, a stretcher was procured, Tim was placed on it, and carried off to Jervis Street, and laid in the accident ward.

"Nothing can be done," said the surgeon on duty, when he had examined the case. "Both his legs are broken, poor little chap! Amputation?—no; he could not stand it. He is sinking fast," he added. "No need to put him to useless torture. We will do all we can to give him ease. . . . But you really must try and restrain yourself, ma'am"—looking at the great, red, bloated creature, who was said to be the boy's mother. Mrs. Brady's stormy lamentations, and passionate, screaming curses "on all tenement owners and their rotten windows," was disturbing the whole ward.

Early the next morning, ragged Pat was admitted to see the patient. He lay in

a little white bed, in a beautiful clean, airy room, with a lady sitting beside him ; there were flowers and pictures, too. He looked so different from the Tim of every day, that his patron actually felt shy and overawed. Tim appeared partly conscious, and contemplated his visitor with a dull and glazing eye, whilst his small, frail hands wandered restlessly over the counterpane, as if in quest of something.

Pat subsequently announced it as *his* opinion, that the little chap was uneasy in his mind, and searching for the boots—goodness pity him !

* * * * *

So Tim passed into the land that is very far off, was buried by the parish, and honoured by a respectable attendance at his funeral. Most of his associates followed on foot—quite a troop of ragged and barelegged boys. There were also two outside cars, and a cab. In this latter

sat Mrs. Corcoran and Mrs. Brady (the poor mother receiving the heart-felt sympathy of ignorant onlookers). She had invested seven-pence halfpenny in a battered crape bonnet, and threepence in a large pocket-handkerchief with a black border (no matter if it *did* wash out). Loud were the tearless wailings, of herself and mother ; they might have been a couple of Banshees shut up in a musty Dublin cab ! Mrs. Brady's self-pity was public and poignant for the space of one whole week. At the end of that period she recovered her serenity and spirits, and was sufficiently recovered to attend the Queen's Theatre with a friend. " Being dull and moped was no good," she said, " to any one."

Not so Mrs. Corcoran. That decent old widow remained inconsolable. Her sighings and whinings were unexpectedly prolonged, and she invariably premised all her conversations with—

"An whatever ye do, don't be talking to me av Tim, for it's more nor I can stand, or bear; me heart is just about bruk. Bad usage, indeed! His mother may have struck him now and again, but she never *bet* him; and meeself never lifted a finger to the child in all me life! Sure, wasn't he the very core of me heart?"

The true reason of this bitter and sustained grief was at last divulged. The hag, under the influence of the best part of a pint of spirits, announced, with blear-eyed audacity, the truth—as it is in whisky as well as wine:

"An hadn't we shocking bad luck," she asked, "not having Tim in a burial club, when we would have been the bether of the boy's death by maybe in or about twenty pound, instead of, so help me, not one brass farthing! *What* did we ever do to desarve the like of that?"

There was a dead silence in the Three

Pikes ; for once, public opinion kept its opinion to itself.

Mrs. Corcoran has now added "the darlin' grandson who fell out of a back window ere last week" to the *répertoire* of her domestic tragedies—and possibly makes a little money by him, after all !

* * * * *

The child is not yet forgotten in Curran's Rents, for a pair of brown Russia leather boots are still hanging in Cohen's window, between a plated teapot and a concertina. They are ticketed, "Best London make. Scarcely worn. Only twelve and sixpence."

And all his little world, as they cast a passing glance, remember that they once belonged to poor Tim Brady.



THE FIRST COMER.



THE FIRST COMER.

"Making night hideous."

Hamlet.

I AM an old maid, and am not the least ashamed of the circumstance. Pray, why should women not be allowed the benefit of the doubt like men, and be supposed to remain single from choice?

I can assure you that it is not from want of *offers* that I am Miss Janet MacTavish, spinster. I could tell—but no matter. It is not to set down a list of proposals that I have taken pen in hand, but to relate a very mysterious occurrence that happened in our house last spring.

My sister Matilda and I are a well-to-do

couple of maiden ladies, having no poor relatives, and a comfortable private fortune. We keep four servants (all female), and occupy a large detached house in a fashionable part of Edinburgh, and the circle in which we move is most exclusive and genteel.

Matilda is a good deal older than I am (though we dress alike), and is somewhat of an invalid.

Our east winds are certainly trying, and last March she had a very sharp attack of bronchitis, brought on (between ourselves) by her own rash imprudence. Though I may not say this to her face, I may say it here.

She does not approve of fiction, though, goodness knows, what I am going to set down is not fiction, but fact; but any literary work in a gay paper cover (of course, I don't mean tracts), such as novels and magazines, is an abomination in her eyes, and "reading such-like trash" she considers sinful waste of time.

So, even if this falls into her hands by an odd chance, she will never read it, and I am quite safe in writing out everything that happened, as I dare not do if I thought that Mattie was coming after me and picking holes in every sentence.

Matilda is terribly particular about grammar and orthography, and reads over all my letters before I venture to close them.

Dear me, how I have wandered away from my point! I'm sure that no one will care to know that I am a little in awe of my elder, that she treats me sometimes as if I were still in my teens. But people may like to hear of the queer thing that happened to me, and I am really and truly coming to it at last.

Matilda was ill with bronchitis, very ill. Bella (that's our sewing-maid and general factotum, who has been with us twelve years this term) and I took it in turns to sit up with her at night. It happened to be my

night, and I was sitting over the fire in a half-kind of doze, when Matilda woke up, and nothing would serve her but a cup of tea of all things, at two o'clock in the morning—the kitchen fire out, no hot water, and every one in the house in their beds, except myself.

I had some nice beef-tea in a little pan beside the hob, and I coaxed her hard to try some of that, but not a bit of it. Nothing would serve her but real tea, and I knew that once she had taken the notion in her head, I might just as well do her bidding first as last. So I opened the door and went out, thinking to take the small lamp, for, of course, all the gas was out, and turned off at the meter—as it ought to be in every decent house.

“ You’ll no do that ! ” she said, quite cross. Mattie speaks broad when she is vexed, and we had had a bit of argument about the tea. “ You’ll no do that, and leave me here

without the light! Just go down and infuse me a cup of tea as quick as ever you can, for I know I'll be awfully the better of it!"

So there was just nothing else for it, and down I went in the pitch-black darkness, not liking the job at all.

It was not that I was afraid. Not I. But the notion of having to rake up and make the kitchen fire, and boil the kettle, was an errand that went rather against the grain, especially as I'm a terrible bad hand at lighting a fire.

I was thinking of this and wondering where were the wood and the matches to be found, when, just as I reached the head of the stairs, I was delighted to hear a great raking out of cinders below in the kitchen. Such a raking and poking and banging of coals and knocking about of the range I never did hear, and I said to myself—

"This is fine; it's washing morning" (we

do our washing at home) "and later than I thought ; and the servants are up, so it's all right ;" and I ran down the kitchen stairs, quite inspirited like by the idea. As I passed the door of the servants' room (where cook and housemaid slept), Harris, that's the housemaid, called out—

" Who's that ? "

I went to the door and said—

" It's I, Miss Janet. I want a cup of tea for Miss MacTavish."

In a moment Harris had thrown on some clothes and was out in the passage. She was always a quick, willing girl, and very obliging. She said (it was black dark, and I could not see her)—

" Never you mind, Miss Janet ; I'll light the fire and boil up the kettle in no time."

" You need not do that," said I, " for there's some one at the fire already—cook, I suppose."

" Not me, ma'am," said a sleepy voice

from the interior of the bedroom. "I'm in my bed."

"Then who can it be?" I asked, for the banging and raking had become still more tremendous, and the thunder of the poker was just awful!

"It must be Bella," said Harris, feeling her way to the kitchen door and pushing it open, followed by me.

We stood for full half a minute in the dark, whilst she felt about and groped for the matches, and still the noise continued.

"Bella," I said crossly, "what on earth——"

But at this instant the match was struck, and dimly lit up the kitchen. I strained my eyes into the darkness, whilst Harris composedly lit a candle. I looked, and looked, and looked again, but there was no one in the kitchen but ourselves.

I was just petrified, I can tell you, and I staggered against the dresser, and gaped at

the now silent fireplace. The coals and cinders and ashes were exactly as they had gone out, not a bit disturbed; any one could see that they had never been stirred.

"In the name of goodness, Harris," I said in a whisper, "where is the person that was poking that fire? You heard them yourself!"

"I heard a noise, sure enough, Miss Janet," she said, not a bit daunted; "and if I was a body that believed in ghosts and such-like clavers, I'd say it was them," putting firewood in the grate as she spoke. "It's queer, certainly. Miss MacTavish will be wearying for her tea," she added. "I know well what it is to have a kind of longing for a good cup. Save us! what a cold air there is in this kitchen. I wonder where cook put the bellows."

Seeing that Harris was taking the matter so coolly, for very shame I was forced to do the like; so I did not say a word



about my misgivings, nor the odd queer thrill I had felt as we stood in the pitch darkness and listened to the furious raking of the kitchen grate.

How icy cold the kitchen had been! just like a vault, and with the same damp, earthy smell!

I was in a mighty hurry to get back upstairs, believe me, and did all in my power to speed the fire and the kettle, and in due time we wended our way above, Harris bearing the tea on a tray, and walking last.

I left her to administer the refreshment, whilst I went into Bella's room, which was close by, candle in hand.

"You are awake, I see, Bella," I remarked, putting it down as I spoke (I felt that I must unbosom myself to some one, or never close an eye that night). "Tell me, did you hear a great raking of the kitchen fire just now?"

"Yes, miss, of course. Why, it woke me.

I suppose you had occasion to go down for something, Miss Janet ; but why did you not call me ? ”

“ It was not I who woke you, Bella,” I rejoined quickly. “ I was on my way down-stairs when I heard that noise below, and I thought it was Cook or Harris, but when I got down Harris came out of the bedroom. Cook was in bed. Maggie, you know, is up above you, and we went into the kitchen, thinking it might be you or her, and lit a candle ; but I give you my word of honour that, although the noise was really terrible till we struck a light, when we looked about us not a soul was to be seen ! ”

At this, Bella started up in bed, and became of a livid, chalky kind of colour.

“ No one, Miss Janet ? ” she gasped out.

“ Not a soul ! ” I replied solemnly.

“ Then, oh ! ” she exclaimed, now jumping bodily out on the floor, and looking quite wild and distracted, “ tell me, in Heaven’s

name, which of you went into the kitchen first, you or Harris ? ” She was so agitated, she seemed scarcely able to bring out the words, and her eyes rested upon mine with a strange, frightened look, that made me fancy she had taken temporary leave of her wits.

“ Harris went first,” I answered shortly.

“ Thank Heaven for that ! ” she returned, now collapsing on the edge of her bed. “ But poor Kate Harris is a dead woman ! ”

I stared hard at Bella, as well I might. Was she talking in her sleep ? or was I dreaming ?

“ What do you mean, Bella Cameron ? ” I cried. “ Are you gone crazy ? Are you gone clean daft ? ”

“ It was a warning,” she replied, in a low and awe-struck voice. “ We Highlanders understand the like well ! It was a warning of death ! Kate Harris’s hour has come.”

“ If you are going to talk such wicked

nonsense, Bella," I said, "I'm not going to stop to listen. Whatever you do, don't let Matilda hear you going on with such foolishness. The house would not hold her, and you know that well."

"All right, Miss Janet; you heard the commotion yourself—you will allow that; and you will see that the kitchen grate is never raked out for nothing. I only wish, from the bottom of my heart, that what I've told you may not come true; but, bad as it was, I'm thankful that you were not first in the kitchen."

A few more indignant expostulations on my part, and lamentations on Bella's, and then I went back to Matilda, and it being now near three o'clock, and she inclined to be drowsy, I lay down on the sofa, and got a couple of hours' sleep.

A day or two afterwards I was suddenly struck with a strange thrill of apprehension by noticing how very, very ill Kate Harris

looked. I taxed her with not feeling well, and she admitted that she had not been herself, and could not say what ailed her. She had no actual pain, but she felt weak all over, and could scarcely drag herself about the house, "It would go off. She would not see a doctor—No, no, no!—It was only just a kind of cold feeling in her bones, and a sort of notion that a hand was gripping her throat. It was all fancy; and Dr. Henderson (our doctor) would make fine game of her if he saw her by way of being a patient. She would be all right in a day or two." Vain hope! In a day or two she was much worse. She was obliged to give in—to take to her bed. I sent for Dr. Henderson—indeed he called daily to visit Mattie—so I had only to pilot him down below to see Kate. He came out to me presently with a very grave face, and said—

"Has she any friends?"—pointing towards Kate's door with his thumb.

"Friends! To be sure," I answered.
"She has a sister married to a tram conductor in Wickham Street."

"Send for her at once; and you had better have her moved. She can't last a week."

"Do you mean that she is going to die?" I gasped, clutching the balusters, for we were standing in the lower hall.

"I am sorry to say the case is hopeless. Nothing can save her, and the sooner she is with her own people the better."

I was, I need scarcely tell you, greatly shocked—terribly shocked—and presently, when I had recovered myself, I sent off, post-haste, for Kate's sister.

I went in to see her. She, poor creature, was all curiosity to know what the doctor had said.

"He would tell me nothing, miss," she observed smilingly. "Only felt my pulse, and tried my heart with a stethoscope, and

my temperature with that queer little tube. I only feel a bit tired and out of breath ; but you'll find I'll be all right in a day or two. I'm only sorry I'm giving all this trouble, and Bella and Mary having to do my work. However, I'll be fit to clean the plate on Saturday."

Poor soul, little did she dream that her work in this world was done !

And I, as I sat beside the bed and looked at her always pale face, her now livid lips and hollow eyes, told myself that already I could see the hand of Death on her countenance. I was obliged to tell her sister what the doctor had said ; and how she cried —and so did I—and who was to tell Kate ? We wished to keep her with us undisturbed —Matilda and I—but her people would not hear of it, and so we had an ambulance from the hospital and sent her home.

She just lived a week, and, strange to say, she had always the greatest craving for me

to be with her, for me to sit beside her, and read to her, and hold her hand. She showed far more anxiety for *my* company than for that of any of her own people.

Bella alone, of all the household, expressed no astonishment when she heard the doctor's startling verdict. Being in Mattie's room at the time, she merely looked over at me gravely, and significantly shook her head.

One evening Bella and I were with her ; she had lain silent for a long time, and then she said to me quite suddenly—

“ Miss Janet, you'll remember the morning you came downstairs looking for Miss MacTavish's tea ? ” (Did I not recollect it, only too well !) “ Somehow, I got a queer kind of chill then ; I felt it at the time, to the very marrow of my bones. I have never been warm since. It was just this day fortnight. I remember it well, because it was washing Monday.”

That night Kate Harris died. She

passed away, as it were, in her sleep, with her hand in mine. As she was with me on that mysterious night, so I was now with her.

Call me a superstitious old imbecile, or what you like, but I firmly believe that, had I entered that kitchen first, it would have been Janet MacTavish, and not Kate Harris, who was lying in her coffin !

Of course Matilda knows nothing of this, nor ever will. Perhaps—for she is one of your strong-minded folk—she would scout at the idea, and at me, for a daft, silly body, and try to explain it all away quite reasonable like. I only wish she could !



JACK STRAW'S CASTLE.



JACK STRAW'S CASTLE.

"I have supp'd full with horrors."

Macbeth.

MAJOR BLEWE, of the Honourable East India Company's Service, hated all manner of men and loved all blends of whisky ; the result of this idiosyncrasy was that, after suffering many things from him for many years, the officers of the South Nellore Regiment revolted *en masse*. Endurance has its limits. If a comrade is a smart soldier and a good fellow, much is overlooked ; but Major Blewe was neither, and, after an outrageous scene at an inspection dinner, he received a strong official hint to go.

He left, with a substantial pension. He

was not "broke"—and carried away with him the detestation of a large body of men, an unparalleled grievance, and a deathless thirst for strong waters. The Major did not return to his native land, but settled down on a hill station in Madras—whether it was on the Nilgherries, the Pulneys, the Shevaroys, or elsewhere, is immaterial. Suffice to say, that he rented a four-roomed bungalow near a small station. It was cheap, in good repair, out of the way, and solitary—standing on a bare hillside, almost surrounded and concealed by rows of funereal pines, and known by the name of "Jack Straw's Castle." Here Major Blewe took up his abode, and made, as was his custom, life a purgatory to his miserable retainers. He had joined the Service in the days when, among a certain set, cursing and beating one's servants was a fashionable and laudable action, and he prided himself that he was conservative, had never discarded old habits, and that every domestic

in his employment had been conscientiously and soundly thrashed. He failed, however, to mention the one grand occasion on which, having dragged an able-bodied chokra into his bath-room—there to belabour him privately and at ease—that too vigorous young man had administered to his employer such a drubbing that he was unable to leave his bed for weeks—and meanwhile the delinquent had decamped with the major's gold watch, silver spoons, and his pet cane!

This had *not* been a lesson, and was an old story now. Major Blewe was a notoriously bad master; his name was well noted in various bazaars. Why, then, did Hassan, his butler, and Ahmed, his cook (brothers), remain with him year after year? It was true that the wages were considerable, but what wages can repay a man for blows, kicks, curses, and insults? Major Blewe had the gift of tongues, and his invectives were as glib and as coarse as those

of any old Tamil grass-cutter. The water-man and dhoby had a better time than the indoor domestics, not being so constantly *en evidence*, but no horsekeeper born of woman would remain two days, and the major kept no pony—fortunately for that quadruped.

He invariably began the day with a hoarse, savage roar, when his early morning peg was first introduced to him. As the hours went by, these roars increased and multiplied—accompanied by kicks and blows. Attendance on him was almost as dangerous as waiting on a wild beast. In fact, he was worse than some, for he threw bottles with a deadly aim—also lamps, and scalding water. Rash, indeed, the bill collector who ventured within his reach. To be brief, Major Blewe was a degraded old savage, and yet some people declared “that he could be a gentleman when he chose.” Now and then he appeared in the local reading-room and at

church—red-faced, beetle-browed, blustering—but clothed, not to say dressed, and dapper, and in his right mind. But what about those other—alas ! too frequent—occasions when he was to be met, singing and staggering along the high-road, with the top button of his coat fastened in the lowest button-hole of the said garment, and a guilty black bottle protruding from his pocket ?

He had no occupation ; he made no attempt at gardening, beyond cultivating some red chilis ; and his reading was confined to the local paper, which often accumulated unopened for weeks. He spent his days in swallowing strong pegs, smoking rank "Trichys," and harrying his staff by night and day. Foolhardy, indeed, the man who dared to call his soul his own !

The owner of Jack Straw's Castle was a slender, narrow-chested Eurasian, named Ezra Pedro. He collected his rents monthly, and in person. Occasionally he arrived at

Major Blewe's at some desperate domestic crisis ; and once, when he found his tenant tearing off the butler's turban and coat, he ventured to expostulate, and privately asked the major " if he was not afraid of appearing before the cantonment magistrate—not afraid of law proceedings ? "

" Law action ? I'd like to see them try to bully old Joe Blewe ! I am in my own house, where I do as I please ! My house is my castle—Joe Blewe's Castle ! "

" If I were you, my honoured sir, I would send away your cook and butler, and the water-man. I have heard things"—lowering his voice—" in the bazaar — hints, whispers——"

" That they rob me ? Of course they do ! "

" If I may humbly venture to suggest, I would counsel more gentle and polite treatment, honourable sir ; and I implore you to get rid of your present servants at once. You may be sorry if you keep them

—and—so may I. I do not wish to lose an excellent tenant, now you have been here thirteen years."

"Who the devil said I was going to leave?" bawled the major. "Wait till I give you notice! Keep your opinions to yourself, you snivelling, meddling, pudding-faced black brute! Here! get out of the place at once, or I'll help you!"

And poor, timid, well-meaning Mr. Ezra Pedro was fain to retire with undignified celerity.

After a short time, there were whispers and vague rumours that Major Blewe—Blue Devil, as he was called—had been worse than usual with respect to violence, language, and liquor. He had broken the water-man's head, kicked the cook's wife's mother, and drowned the butler's beloved and only dog. Of late he had not been encountered slanting about the highways, and his absence was a relief; nor had he appeared in church or

reading-room. The individual most interested in his welfare was his landlord, who arrived punctually on the first day of the month, receipt in hand.

He rapped timidly—no answer. Then he hammered boldly. After all, there was a month's rent due, and it was *his* house. Still dead silence. He called to a passing acquaintance, and together they peeped around, listened, whispered, wondered, and finally climbed in through an ill-secured window.

The bungalow proved to be as neat as a new pin, and in apple-pie order (it was let furnished, as are all hill houses). The major's bedroom was beautifully tidy ; long double rows of empty bottles stood as if “dressed” on parade ; his clothes were folded up, his topee and cap hung below his sword-scabbard ; his shaving apparatus (razor included) was arranged in tempting order ; and a clock was briskly ticking on

the chimney-piece. The tiny sitting-room was chiefly filled by a long chair, a teapoy, pipes, and peg tumblers. It was vacant. The little dining-room—ah! here was a promising sign. The cloth was laid in preparation for a meal. There were appointments for two, a cruet-stand and well-filled decanter were set by the major's seat, and a good-sized covered dish was placed before it. The flies were swarming around this, and some rash impulse of curiosity tempted Pedro to raise the electro-plated lid. He gave a shrill, wild scream as he let it fall with a frightful clang; for, grinning at him, on the dish, was Major Blewe's head!

The landlord and his companion tore out of the bungalow, and, in the language of old story-books, they ran, and they ran, and they ran. They ultimately brought the police, and a vast and excited crowd, to inspect that ghastly dinner-table. The police looked wise—as usual—asked questions,

examined the premises, and made copious entries. But from that day to this—a matter of thirty years and more—no trace has ever been found of Major Blewe's servants, or of Major Blewe's body.

Jack Straw's Castle was to let, a bargain, for many seasons ; and for many seasons it “has stood, a roofless ruin.”

THE RED WOOLLEN
NECKTIE.





THE RED WOOLLEN NECKTIE.

“I had a dream which was not all a dream.”

BYRON.

WHEN this century had reached the age allotted to man, and I was but yet in my teens, we lived in a rambling old place in the west, called Coolnafinn. My father, Colonel Mardall, succeeded to this property at a truly propitious moment; for just as he was “kicked out” of the service, for age, another career opened its arms to him—one almost as exciting and uncertain—in short, the career of an Irish landlord.

We found Coolnafinn in surprisingly good repair, surrounded by a fine well-timbered



demesne, and, imposing as it was isolated, the house stood at the junction of the back and front avenues, which were each a mile in length. We were four miles from church, ten from our post town, and fifteen from a station ; neighbours were few and far between, but we were a host in ourselves—seven motherless boys and girls,—and the roomy old mansion, great walled gardens, orchards and grounds, proved a delightful change from barrack quarters, and the narrow limits of the conventional furnished house of a garrison town.

The experience that I am about to relate occurred when I was nineteen, that is to say, when chignons and croquet were the fashion. In spite of my years I was credited with an old head on young shoulders, and was the mistress of my father's establishment, and keeper of the keys—no easy post, considering that I had to deal with six boisterous and critical young relatives.

I shared the same room with my sister

Fanny. It was the best bedroom—a great lofty apartment with three bow windows. One hot July night, I could not sleep for ages—I tumbled and tossed; I got up and drank water; I counted the prescribed “hundred sleep;” I watched the moonlight steal in between the blinds, and touch each separate object on which it fell, with a pale, weird light; I felt cold, shivering, frightened—but why? I did not believe in ghosts. I was not alone, for there was Fanny in an opposite bed, breathing regularly, and evidently far away in the land of dreams. What ailed me? Why was I conscious of a beating heart, accompanied by a scarcely defined, but undeniable dread? At last I “fell off,” and I dreamt—though all the time, even in my dream, I said to myself, “This is not a dream; it is real.”

It seemed as if the house, for some unexplained reason, was empty; I was absolutely alone, sitting reading in the drawing-

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room with my back to one of the long French windows which opened to the ground. Suddenly a dark shadow came between me and the light, and, turning round, I beheld a tall, powerful man, with his head pressed closely against the glass ; his face was shaded by a weather-beaten wide-awake, or caubeen ; he was dressed like a tramp, and the only thing I particularly noticed about him was a pair of very large, dirty hands, and a red worsted necktie.

He remained for some seconds leaning against the sash, and gazing intently into the room ; then I started to my feet, and called out—

“ What do you want ? ”

“ Is the colonel within ? ” he asked, in a hoarse voice.

“ No, he is out,” I screamed in reply.

“ I want to see him badly. I served under him wance. Is Master Robin, or Master Ted, in ? ”

I shook my head.

"I've come a terrible long way"—holding up a large foot in a dusty broken shoe—"and I'm dying on my feet wid hunger and the wakeness."

"Wait, then," I cried, on a sudden impulse.
"Go round to the front entrance."

I hurried into the hall—intent on benevolence and broken victuals—and flung the door wide open. Quick as I had been, the tramp was already on the steps.

"Are they all out, miss?" he panted, in a husky voice.

"All," I replied, and I was about to add "except myself;" but ere I could utter another syllable he had sprung at me, seized me by the throat with brutal ferocity, and pressing me hard against a stone pillar, he proceeded to strangle me. I could not move, struggle, or scream. I felt his foul breath on my face, his savage, wolfish eyes fastened on mine. Everything was

becoming black, the world reeled, a strange sound of the sea roared in my ears; I was suffocating, dying, dead! No, for here I awoke, and found myself sitting up and shrieking—shrieking like a maniac.

I saw Fanny jump out of bed by the light of a pale summer night, and come running over to me. She held me tightly, whilst I gasped and panted, precisely as if I had been really choked. Meantime all my relatives (in all sorts of costumes) poured into the room, believing (not unnaturally) that murder was being done.

Presently I recovered my voice, and in faint, broken sentences stammered out my tragic tale, which same tale was received with angry derision by father, and yells of laughter by my kindred. Robin, my eldest brother, who had been the first to arrive upon the scene, armed with an ancient horse pistol, was particularly indignant.

“ If you are taken like this again, Cis,

you will have to sleep in the far greenhouse, or in the back-yard ; your yells sounded for all the world like a pig being killed."

Then, with as much dignity as was compatible with a pair of long bare legs and a short military cape, he made his exit.

When all the kind inquirers had departed, I flung myself into Fanny's sympathetic arms, and enjoyed a thoroughly luxurious cry, and sobbed myself to sleep. "Cissy's friend with the red tie," and "Cissy's dream," became a sort of family joke and a byword with the boys for many, many months. At last other events thrust the jest into the background, and it was eventually forgotten, even by myself, though for weeks and weeks at night I had seemed to feel an iron grip upon my throat, and to meet in the dark the intolerable glare of a pair of wolfish eyes.

Two whole years had passed since I experienced that hideous vision. Robin was in India, with his regiment; Fanny was in

Switzerland—on her honeymoon. We were quite a small party at home now—only five. It was a lovely day in the month of September; father and every one of the family, also the servants, and almost every soul about the place, had departed at daybreak to the great annual fair, held at our nearest town. They had set out at three o'clock, and were not expected home until dark; father had horses to sell and cattle to buy, and each of the domestics required something, for besides a market for multitudes of sheep and oxen, this fair boasted merry-go-rounds, shows and booths. No one remained, save the cook, who might reasonably have been exhibited as “the fat woman,” Scanlan the butler, and myself. Scanlan was an ancient retainer, formerly father's soldier servant, an old bachelor, with a close fist, and a crusty temper, who still insisted on treating me as if I were but six years of age.

I spent the long hours busily; I had

presided at the breakfast by candle-light ; it was not often that I had a day to myself totally undisturbed, and I made the most of it.

I wrote letters, mended garments, rearranged the smoking-room (a daring liberty), made two family cakes, and gathered and arranged a quantity of flowers. Then I prepared to enjoy a well-earned rest—and “Oliver Twist.” I drew my chair into a French window in the drawing-room, and sat with my back to the light, thrilled by the murder of poor Nancy. My nerves were strung to their highest tension, as I followed the awful career of Bill Sikes ; my silly little heart was beating tumultuously ; a mere mouse in the wainscot had actually made me jump. Judge, then, of my feelings, when suddenly a black shadow fell across the page, and turning, I beheld the man of my dream —red necktie and all !

Yes, there he was ; and—no, I was not

asleep, I was wide awake. His hulking body leant heavily against the sash, his frowsy hat was pulled over his eyes, whilst his great hands fumbled awkwardly for the handle of the window. I fastened the bolt precipitately, glanced quickly at the other windows; thank God, they were all closed!

I then screamed out—

“What do you want?”

“Is the colonel within?”

“No; he is out.”

“I want to see him badly. I served under him——”

“Wait,” I cried. Then I darted across the room. I tore at the bell; how it clanged and reverberated through the empty lower regions! I held the door ajar, and saw as it were, unconsciously, a gaunt, slouching figure pass to the front at a shambling run.

Scanlan’s well-drilled military step was oh! what a sweet sound to me! I spoke

to him, still holding the door, ready to fly at an instant's notice.

"There is a dreadful-looking man about, a tramp. Put the chain upon the hall door, and don't let him in," I cried out hysterically.

"All right, miss," replied Scanlan, departing with loud, leisurely footsteps. I heard him put up the chain and open the door with his usual flourish. Presently he closed it and came back, saying very peevishly—

"There's not a soul there, Miss Cissy. Ye were up early, and ye fell asleep without doubt and ye dreamt it."

"No, not this time," was my enigmatic answer. "I expect he is hidden in the laurels. Keep the door locked and barred, for Heaven's sake! and, Scanlan"—in my most coaxing key—"if you don't mind, would you sit in the hall till they come back. I—I—feel dreadfully nervous——"

Scanlan had no sympathy with "nerves;"

nevertheless, he remained within call, biding in the dining-room and library.

They—meaning the family and servants—returned about eight o'clock, all full of their day's doings and in the highest spirits; they discoursed volubly of their bargains in colts, yearlings, calves, ribbons, shawls—and even “ginger-bread husbands.”

“And you, of course, saw no one; you stick at home, Cis,” said my brother Ted.
“You have nothing to tell us?”

“You are mistaken for once,” I answered, tremulously; “the tramp I dreamt about, called—the man with the red necktie.”

“Well, that *is* news. Did he leave his card for me?”

“I did not go to receive him this time, as you may imagine,” I continued, with ill-assumed composure. “I called Scanlan, and when he opened the door, there was no one to be seen!”

“You don’t say so!” cried Teddy, sar-

castically. "I should have been rather surprised if there was; you were dreaming again. How does old pipe-clay like attending on your visionary callers? I thought he looked rather black."

"But it was no dream this time," I repeated. "I saw the tramp as plainly as I see you; the dream was a warning, and saved my life."

"Saved your grandmother! Upon my word, Cissy, it is getting serious, you and your visitor with the red tie;" and he roared with laughter, as rudely as any brother in Great Britain.

Nevertheless, the next morning, he and every one looked grave enough, when news was brought by Pat, the post-boy, that old Pat and Mrs. Kelly, who lived at that lonely spot, the Back Lodge, and were credited with considerable savings, had been found with their house pillaged, and their throats cut. Their spoons, watch, and

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money, had been carried off, although the poor old couple had evidently made a desperate struggle for their lives and property. The furniture was upset, and the walls splashed with blood. However, the only clue to the murderer's identity was part of a red woollen necktie, found in the dead woman's rigid clutch; the other half was subsequently picked up in the wood: but the tramp, its owner, was never seen again; no, not even in my dreams.

HER LAST WISHES.



HER LAST WISHES.

“Rest, rest, perturbed spirit.”

Hamlet.

THE Rev. Eustace Herbert was one of the most indefatigable labourers among the poor of a densely crowded parish in the East of London. Slumming with him was not a mere transient caprice, the fashion of a season, a novel page for idle fingers to scan and turn over—it was his life's work, and an inexorable and ever-present duty. His energy was tireless, his zeal inexhaustible, they laid upon his weak, mortal frame more than it could support. Long hours of work and struggle, short hours of sleep, and scanty meals—all these had their due effect on mind

and body, and both succumbed. The active, eloquent, indomitable priest emerged from a fever a shattered wreck—a prey to depression, insomnia, and delusions.

He was ordered away to new climes and countries ; commanded to forget misery, squalor, crime, cruelty ; to cease to puzzle over social problems, and to exchange grey days and grim scenes for mental idleness and golden sunshine.

A sea voyage restored sleep and appetite to the invalid ; fresh characters and gay surroundings thrust shabby old tenants from his thoughts, and when he landed in Calcutta the Rev. Eustace Herbert was already a new man !

He travelled much and far, and was confronted on every side by old religions and shameless, gaudy idolatry. He beheld with amazed eyes the stern piety of the Mahomedans ; their prompt answers to summons to prayer. He listened to the sonorous

eloquence of a turbaned missionary, preaching the Prophet, at the corner of the street. Religion was an all-important ingredient in daily life, its observance a matter of course, in this vast heathen land! The fact was unpleasantly brought home to him when his hired coachman suddenly dropped from his box, at sundown, and, leaving his horses (a splendid instance of simple faith), prostrated himself on his face in a public thoroughfare.

What would a Londoner think (or say) if his driver were to behave in a like manner? The great pilgrimages were another revelation to the stranger—the fierce, unshaken belief of thousands, as testified by their toilsome journeys and incredible hardships.

The young priest measured with envious eyes the vast multitude which blackened the banks of the Ganges, and recalled with a glow of shame the dimensions of his own scanty flock, whose attendance was often

due to a carnal desire for further donations of port wine, beef tea, and fuel.

He penetrated south—to old Madras, to out-of-the-world, teeming cities—fastnesses of Brahminism—on which one glimmer of nineteenth-century thought has never shed a ray! Here he witnessed, as a man in a dream, many curious ceremonies—the sacrifice in high places of sheep and oxen (precisely as in the days of Moses), and half-maddened wretches gashing themselves with knives, like the priests of Baal—and even beheld at a great distance that revolting spectacle known as “hook swinging.” Truly, he had many awakening experiences, not the least of which occurred on the platform of Pothanore Railway Station. Here he was suddenly accosted by a fair, long-haired European, in native dress (turban and dothi all complete), who thrust a copy of the *War Cry* into his astonished hands, and eagerly demanded if he was “saved.”

This, as well as every other incident, the Rev. Herbert Eustace carefully inscribed in a large Letts's diary, which he wrote up conscientiously before retiring for the night. All his experiences were entered, with one notable exception—an experience he did not venture to set down in black and white, lest it should be read by unbelievers, discredited, and mocked at! It therefore falls to another to repair the omission, and to record the Rev. Eustace Herbert's curious adventure on the Glenvale Coffee Estate in Mysore.

* * * * *

During his ramblings in the Madras Presidency, the clerical explorer found himself within easy reach—that is to say, within a hundred miles—of the home of an old school-fellow, who had failed for the army, married beneath him, and settled down in India for life.

Mr. St. Maur had heard of his friend's

o

arrival in the country, and had urged him to pay him a visit, in the following terms :—

“Glenvale, *via* Oonoor, Mysore.

“DEAR EUSTACE,

“I understand that you are globe-trotting, for your health.

“One of our planters heard you preach at Trichinopoly last Sunday—I am glad you don’t exceed fifteen minutes—and told me of your whereabouts. You must come and pay me a visit; we are only forty miles from Oonoor Station, where I will meet you. It is whispered that you are writing a book of travels. If so, it is your bounden duty to see everything, including an old worn-out coffee estate, and you may put us all in print, if you choose!

“Bar jokes, I will take no refusal, old fellow. I want to see a familiar face from home, to talk over Winchester days, and

to get you to christen our son and heir. We have no padre in these regions, and there are several little jobs for you in the way of joining couples together in holy matrimony.

"I have been five years on the Glenvale coffee plantation, and am rubbing along fairly well, considering the awful state of the rupee, and one or two wretched seasons. I bought the property for a mere song. It was said to be worked out, and the owners were sick of it and this remote part of the earth. However, I find that some pickings are still to be had. A cheap, healthy, outdoor life suits me. I am my own master, though a married man, and I get some first-class shooting, and have several capital fellow planters in the neighbourhood. I can promise you a hearty welcome, a comfortable room, and the best coffee you ever tasted !

"Give me two days' notice, and you will

be met at Oonoor Station by your old friend,

“ J. ST. JOHN ST. MAUR.”

Ten days after the receipt of this epistle, the Rev. Eustace Herbert alighted from the train, about sunrise, at an insignificant little platform, with an enormous name board, on which huge English and Tamil characters contended for space. A stalwart Englishman, whose eager eyes looked out between a mushroom topee and a monstrous beard, welcomed the new arrival with a blow on the back, that nearly landed that frail person in the middle of the track. A tonga and pair of peevish, wiry ponies were in waiting, and as soon as the conveyance had been loaded up with parcels, boxes, stores of sorts, and Mr. Herbert's modest luggage, he and his host started off, clattering down a steep village street, and away towards the foot of the adjacent Blue Mountains. The

road was fair—the “tats” travelled rapidly, by open plain, then dense forest jungle, by rising winding ways, through luxurious tropical scenery, leaving gradually behind them palms, banana-trees, cacti, and sweltering little mud hamlets. On, on, to higher latitudes and colder air—on, up among the coffee and the tea—meeting only lumbering, laden bullock carts, drowsily descending to the low country.

During his forty mile drive the Rev. Eustace Herbert found ample employment for eyes, ears, and tongue. He had much to hear, and yet more to tell.

There was a relay of fresh ponies half-way, and the journey was almost accomplished ere it seemed well begun, so pleasantly had the time—and the miles—flashed by.

The steep, wooded, winding ghaut road had been exchanged for the open plateau, where bright-green downs, dark-green coffee bushes, and the delicate tea plant, divided the soil.

"Here we are on the Glenvale Estate, at last," said St. Maur, as they turned down a by-road to the left. "There is the bungalow—it faces due south; we approach it at the back, as you see."

"It's a big place!" remarked his guest, "like an English country house."

"Yes, it is big—too big for us. It was built fifty years ago, when people did things on a large scale, and lived out in India all their lives. The Mortons owned miles up here—labour was cheap, coffee was dear; they made their pile—at least, old Morton did; the property was divided and split up. I bought this bit with the house—I got it dirt cheap, from a chap called Fleming; he only stayed here a couple of years—he could not stand the life, and bolted."

"It looks a most delightful retreat," cried his friend, as they rapidly drew near a great stone, flat-roofed bungalow, with a deep

pillared verandah, embowered in passion flowers. It was not engulfed to the very steps in coffee bushes, like many a planter's house, but haughtily held the business, plant, and premises, at a distance, and was surrounded by at least twenty acres of short grass, dotted with cinchona trees and clumps of firs. A well-kept avenue wound up to the verandah ; there was no particular hall door, but a dumpy, little woman, in a washed-out print gown, stood on the steps to receive them. This was Mrs. St. John St. Maur—late Miss Jane Bodd, factory hand, of Lancashire, England—who awkwardly welcomed her guest in an exceedingly broad provincial dialect. Yes, and she was fat, freckled, and ordinary. What had possessed St. Maur ! thought his schoolfellow. His wife must have some brilliant qualities, to atone for such lamentable deficiencies—in grace, manners, beauty, and fortune. (She was a cheerful, even-tempered person, a notable house-

keeper—this in the jungle is a valuable accomplishment, and covers a multitude of shortcomings.)

“Joe, did you bring the bacon?” she demanded breathlessly. “Did ye find all the things at the station?”

“Yes; all but the books from Higginbotham.”

“Ah, well, them’s no matter; but we couldn’t well want the lamp oil, and beer, and champagne. Come in, Mr. Herbert; come in do, ye must be starving. Joe here will show you your room, and tiffin is just ready.”

“My wife is not literary,” explained St. Maur with a smile. “You won’t find any yellow asters, lilac sun bonnets, or green carnations lying about our diggings, but she will make you comfortable. Now tell me, what do you think of this?” and he flung wide a door.

His companion uttered an involuntary

exclamation of surprise, the immense room which he entered opened straight into a wide verandah that overlooked the most exquisite prospect his eyes had ever rested upon.

A long valley, sloping away to the misty blue plains, and bounded on either hand by majestic purple mountains; the immediate foreground was filled by a flower garden laid out in true old English fashion, with neat box borders, and gravelled paths, blooming with luxuriant rose bushes, myrtles, heliotropes, gigantic fuchsias, and fragrant orange-trees. A shallow flight of stone steps led from it to a gentle descent of greensward, a kind of wild pleasure ground, with clumps of rhododendrons, acacias, and oaks. This, in turn, gradually lost itself in the surrounding jungle of boulder stones, forest trees, and tree ferns.

The sweet scent of flowers, the balmy afternoon air, penetrated the spare room,

which was spacious, lofty, and scrupulously neat ; it was, moreover, unexpectedly luxurious, being furnished with handsome, old, carved, black wood furniture—a bed, bureau, wardrobe, and toilet-table. The floor was covered with a thick but faded Indian carpet, and the huge rosewood cheval-glass and velvet couch claimed the visitor's respect.

" I took over the bungalow, lock, stock, and barrel," explained St. Maur. " This room is just as it stood in old Morton's time ; it was his daughter's, I believe, and that was her garden. I hope you will find it comfortable."

To this query the Reverend Eustace gave an enthusiastic assent ; this guest chamber, with its windows opening into a lovely pleasure-ground, and commanding an unsurpassed view, was a room in which to entertain happy or noble thoughts, and to dream enchanting dreams. The visitor

was charmed with everything he was introduced to—from the quaint old bungalow, with its air of age and better days, to the great white pulping-house and the small red baby.

Worn out by his journey, and soothed by the perfume-laden air, the Rev. Eustace Herbert fell asleep almost as soon as he laid his head on the pillow. It was a full moon that sailed in the sky, and her light was as bright as day. One of the windows stood wide open that warm April night; gradually the traveller's eyes closed on his surroundings, on the shrubs in the garden, throwing sharp black shadows on the vague objects in the room—on the whole world. He slept profoundly for some time, when all at once, and for no apparent reason, he found himself distinctly wide awake! It seemed to him that he heard a faint, but distinctly audible, sigh. Surely there was some one in the room?

Yes. A woman in a white gown was sitting at the dressing-table, leaning her head on her hand. He raised himself stealthily on his elbow, and saw that she was absorbed in a volume which lay open before her. It was his own Prayer-book. Presently he sat up, and gave a gentle cough of expostulation.

The lady slowly turned her head, and looked at him. She had a pair of deep pathetic eyes, and a pretty young face—but it was wan and sad.

Then she rose wearily, as if she was extremely tired, passed through the open window, and walked out into the garden without sound of footfall. Who could she be?—he had not seen her the previous evening. He jumped from his bed, rushed to the verandah, and gazed up and down—there was no one within sight. Then he glanced at his open Prayer-book, and gave a violent and involuntary start, for it lay

wide open at "The Service for the Burial of the Dead."

* * * * *

The next morning her visitor discovered Mrs. St. Maur bustling about among her stores and servants—excessively busy with preparations for the christening, and two weddings, which were to take place that same afternoon.

She, however, found time, between voluble orders in the Tamil language, to ask him how he had slept, and she eyed him a little anxiously.

"Like a top, thank you."

"That's all right"—turning away.

"But," he added, "every one else is not so fortunate."

Mrs. St. Maur paused, and stared.

"Surely you have a somnambulist on the premises. Have you not?"

"Laws—no! I never heard of that sort of religion—but my cook says he is a Baptist!"

"Oh, I don't mean that—but some one who walks in their sleep, don't you know?"

Mrs. St. Maur gaped at him open-mouthed.

"I never heard of the like—no one walks here! Happen you'd a nightmare—we had pork for dinner. You think some one was tramping round?"

"Yes, I am sure of it."

"It might have been the chokedar. Last time young Forbes slept in that room, he complained of him, and said he saw him poking about the dressing-table. I did give it to the old gentleman, though he declared he never was that side of the house all night."

As the Reverend Eustace turned to greet her husband, he distinctly heard her mutter to herself, in a querulous aside, "There's always complaints about that room."

The christening and the two weddings (one of a planter's assistant, and the other

of a Eurasian clerk) took place at Glenvale, with great *éclat*. There was a cake from D'Angelis, champagne, quantities of real orange blossoms, and a large and merry company who had assembled from all the surrounding estates, in order to make holiday.

By ten o'clock, however, the last tonga, the last lazy bullock bandy, and the last reluctant pony, had departed, and peace, silence, and moonlight once more fell upon the Glenvale estate.

And once more towards the small hours, the reverend guest was aroused, and again he saw the lady reading at his dressing-table, a young lady, who raised her head and gazed at him with eyes of haggard reproach, then arose deliberately, sauntered through the open window, passed down the garden towards the slope, and with a quick, beckoning wave of her hand, disappeared amidst a clump of far-distant rhododendrons.

Yes. There was the Prayer-book wide open in the same place ; the whole occurrence was exceedingly mysterious. There was no use in questioning Mrs. St. Maur, but over a morning pipe in the verandah he unfolded his experience to her husband.

"At first I thought it was one of my old delusions, but my head is clear enough, and I never was better in my life. What does it mean, Joe? Can you explain it in any reasonable way?"

"No ; but perhaps old Murphy, who was overseer here for twenty years, can throw some light on it. He was born and bred on these hills and lived with his daughter in Coimbatore. He happens to be up now, with his son, who has a small tea estate, the other side of the ghaut. He is coming round this afternoon, I know, to drink the kid's health, and look at the new crop. If any one can tell us yarns about this place, he can, and he will be willing enough—for

he is the greatest talker in the Presidency. You say you distinctly saw the girl pass through the garden, down the slope, and then turn and beckon to you before she disappeared among the trees ? I must confess that I wonder you did not follow her."

"Yes—but I was in my sleeping suit and bare feet, you see, and I must confess that I never had the least impulse to do so ; quite the contrary, in fact."

"Suppose we go and make a search now ; you can tell me the bearings of whereabouts she vanished ?"

"Of course I can ; it was quite a long way down—near a rhododendron clump. Come on."

The two old schoolfellows turned off to the slope, and to where it was bounded by the greedy, ever insatiable jungle. They pushed aside some straggling branches of a great overgrown rhododendron, and there discovered a long, significant mound—in

short, a grave. As they stood looking at one another across it, a loud hearty voice exclaimed :

"So you have it at last! I always knew it would be found some day—I mean where Miss Nellie Morton was buried!"

"Hullo, Murphy, is that yourself?" cried St. Maur. "Glad to see you. Who was Miss Nellie Morton, and why was she buried here?"

"She was buried here because she died here, of cholera, poor dear child! and she was young Morton's only sister. She lived with him and his wife. The black cholera was raging round, and the coolies, and servants, and every living soul, fled the place—just ran for their dear lives—never stopped to pack a bundle, or to turn a key. It was awful bad in these hills, that season! Miss Nellie got it from nursing her ayah—she was took herself in a couple of hours. Young Morton and one of his assistants

buried her—no one knew when or where—and then he and his wife cleared out that same hour; but he and his assistant got cholera too, and died on their way down the Seegor Ghaut; you may see the graves by the roadside any day. His wife never came back here; she always hated the place, for she was main fond of balls and society, and used to sit crying, for amusement and company, for hours together! But Miss Nellie, she loved every inch and stone of Glenvale. You see, she was born here, but eddicated at home; she knew every path for miles. It was she made the flower garden and the seat under the orange tree, and she was a great horsewoman, and a real beauty too. Young Norris, across the valley, was her intended husband, and he was away in Madras on business; and when he came back again here, and found the whole place deserted, the cattle and fowl straying wild, and her dead, he nearly went mad, and no wonder.

He could never find her grave—not though he searched for days and days—and no one knew where she was laid by her brother, seeing as he was gone too; but you discovered it easily enough, sir"—nodding at the clergyman.

"Yes," he replied, with a meaning look at his friend; "I had no difficulty at all."

"Mr. Norris is not young Norris now, but he has never married—he lives alone across the valley, and I am sure he would be very thankful to know where she lies—at long last."

"Yes," assented St. Maur, "we will send him word, but the news need not be given out elsewhere. Don't tell Janie"—addressing his guest; "she is awfully superstitious. She would not stay here an hour if she suspected that there was a ghost in the house. I knew that the bungalow stood empty for years before Fleming came, and I did hear that the reason he cleared out was that he

could not stand a girl who came and cried and beckoned to him at the door ; but as I knew he had had D.T. several times, and made the same complaints of sheep, and cockatoos, and snakes, I thought nothing of it. However, I now remember that one or two planter fellows said they could never sleep properly in that room ; it was too big, so they declared—but the truth is, I suppose, they were ashamed to confess that they had seen her ! ”

That same evening the christening and wedding ceremonies were supplemented by another, which was held privately at sundown—over the grave among the rhododendrons. Only Mr. Norris, Old Murphy, Mr. St. Maur, and his friend were present. And it is an unquestionable fact that, after this service, the figure in the spare room was never seen again.

The Rev. Eustace Herbert duly published his book, “Six Months among Strange

Sights ;" it has appeared in neat six-shilling form, but its pages may be searched in vain for the most thrilling of his experiences—the fact that he had complied with an unspoken request from an apparition in the Glenvale guest-chamber, and had personally carried out the last wishes of a ghost !

THE END.





[Sept. 1895.



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